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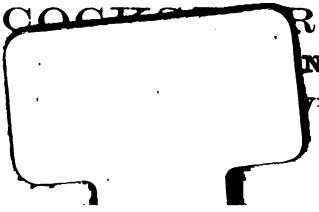
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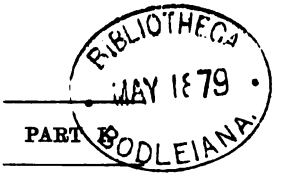
OF

ENGLAND,

THEIR FACILITIES, CHARACTER, AND REQUIREMENTS

A GUIDE TO HUNTING MEN.

By BROOKSBY.



LONDON: THE "FIELD" OFFICE, 346, STRAND, W.C.

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individual, and his stud, will find themselves most at home.

Army men especially are often puzzled to fix upon the scene of their two or three months' sport. They would frequently prefer to vary their sphere of action; but as their term of leave is limited, they cannot afford the risk of disappointment in trying new ground. Often, too, their stud is weak in numbers; they wish to make the most of it, but do not care to throw their lot in where, if unable to hunt *every* day, they would find themselves left more or less in the lurch. For this reason they must follow the chase either within reach of their own neighbourhood and connections, or within reasonable distance of their Club and the resources of Town.

City men in the same way can seldom afford to devote themselves for long together to the more isolating phases of the sport. They are fain to divide their time, in such proportion as they may, between the two rival divinities whom they serve. The dusty shrine in Lombard-street has as strong a claim upon them as the sylvan grove of Faunus; and for each hour in the merry company of the goat-like deity they must devote two to the golden calf.

It has long been received as an apothegm, that when you are in London you are within reach of everywhere else; and so, in dealing with each country, it will be assumed that London is the base from which the inquirer intends to start. For the route thence to any point is a direct and easy one. To master cross-country travel by groping through the maze of Bradshaw and local map must be left to the

ingenuity of the explorer himself; and thus all allusions to the comparative accessibility of different hunting quarters is to be taken with regard to London as the starting point.

Stanford's Large Scale Railway and Station Maps will be taken as illustrating and fixing the topography of the work in question. These are coloured to show the divisions of England into hunts, and will be found as accurate as such frequently-shifting and often indefinite geography can well be. Being on a scale of three miles to an inch, they are of sufficient size to admit of all the principal points and features of a country being shown, and yet are not over-crowded with unnecessary names. They are in twenty-four sheets—each sheet being 28in. by 20in. The price of each sheet is—plain 1*s.*, mounted in case 2*s.* 6*d.*; coloured 1*s.* 6*d.*, in case 3*s.* The coloured ones, mounted in case, are much to be preferred for our purpose.

As we have inferred before, our object will be to sketch out a *menu*, from which men may choose as their appetite prompts.

It is not every one who enjoys the presence of a crowd, who loves the rush and scramble of three or four hundred people struggling for a start, or who even cares for the thrill of a dashing burst over the grass. Nor, again, is it every one to whom the sight of hounds picking their way over a cold fallow is a thing of joy, nor does every one appreciate the crash of a woodland or the blind plunge down a deep ride. Verily some men hunt to ride, some ride to hunt, and others, thank heaven, double their fun by doing both. *Chacun à son goût.* Let us try and show where

each of you can suit his taste, his weight, his nerves, his age and his purse—and yet not go into a barren land.

Most vital contingent and condition of all is the purse. Carry one you must, and always either have a coin in it or imagine you have. This done, its variations need have a less general and arbitrary effect upon your sport than would be imagined. If it be at a low ebb you cannot of course (honestly) buy as many horses as you might otherwise do; and you can't hunt as many days per week. In these ways the ill-filled purse has, it is impossible to deny, a most depressing and confining effect. But beyond these its influence is by no means as strongly felt as the other conditions enumerated—at all events in the main point under consideration—choice of country. If your taste, weight, age and nerves are right, go into a *good* country while you can—and with all confidence. Make yourself other pursuits there to fill up your interim time; or else, as discussed above, let your choice light within reach of your main occupation. Railways have brought good countries enough within reach of London: and almost every other great centre can boast of the same advantage. For, we would argue, a horse eats no more in a *good country* than in a bad one; hotel and stabling charges vary on quite other principles (we know not what) than those of locality; in *no* country are you likely to ride a worse horse if you can afford a better; the best saddlery is everywhere economy; and you ought to have (Why on earth *don't* you?) good leathers, decent boots coat and hat *wherever* you hunt.

THE BELVOIR.*

Our first sketch deals with what is undoubtedly a *good country* in every sense of the term; and one which, perhaps, of all others, admits of an individual enjoying and sharing in hunting of the highest class without necessarily binding him to great extravagance of either time or money. The magnificent Belvoir pack is open, on the one hand, to the Meltonian—with the extensive stud that is almost a *sine quâ non* to the residence in Melton—or is still more constantly and readily available to whoever may choose Grantham as his resting place. Grantham is a neat little town of about 5000 inhabitants, situate in the very midst of the Duke of Rutland's Hunt and replete with every convenience for the hunting man. It lies some six miles from the beautiful Castle of Belvoir, and consequently from the Kennels; while almost all the meets are within a radius of ten or a dozen miles. In two hours and thirty-five minutes from King's Cross the Great Northern Railway (according to Mr. Jorrocks, the best covert hack in England) will land you at Grantham; but unless you are hardy and vigorous enough to leave London at 5 a.m., you will find it more convenient to employ the iron horse to

* *Vide* Stanford's "Railway and Hunting Maps," sheet 10.

convey you down to dinner over-night, rather than as a covert hack in the morning.

The Belvoir hounds are quite one of the oldest packs in the kingdom—their kennel books dating back as far as 1756—and certainly they are at the present time the most *striking* pack in England at the covertside. Their beautiful uniformity of colouring, their high class, and their wonderful evenness in appearance are quite unapproached elsewhere. It might be thought that these qualities could not have been brought to such a pitch of excellence, without sacrifice of other more practical attributes, did we not know that nearly a century and a half has been expended in reaching this standard, and that each year as many as a hundred couple of puppies (occasionally even more) are sent out to walk. With such a choice of new material there can be little difficulty in filling up the gaps—or even to maintain a standard so unyielding. It puzzles an outsider to imagine how the kennel men ever learn their hounds by name—so extraordinarily similar are they in marking and *contour*. Every hound has the black "saddle-mark" on his back; every hound has his "Belvoir tan" head; while the groundwork of each skin is purest white. To draw them by name, when standing with their heads all in one direction, would indeed seem an almost hopeless feat. On their pedigrees and history we do not propose to enter here. These have been discussed at length in the columns of *The Field*; and have no immediate connection with our present purpose. But we say it with emphasis, "Who has not seen the Belvoir at the covertside

has missed a sight such as no other pack can afford."

With sixty to sixty-five couple of hounds in kennel, they hunt five days a week—which is quite as much as a huntsman can do without over-taxing his strength or destroying his energy. Indeed, in such open seasons as the two last the strain upon the huntsman's physical powers must have been immense—bearing in mind that two months of cubhunting (itself a tiring experience) precede November, and that a huntsman must ever be the last man home.

No country presents a greater variety in itself than the Belvoir. Within its confines you may ride over small grass meadows, broad grazing grounds, light heath and heavy plough. Thus it is impossible to sum up its characteristics in a sentence or two; but they must rather be left to make themselves apparent as we go on to classify the different sections of His Grace's kingdom.

On Mondays and alternate Saturdays the meets are fixed for the neighbourhood of the Castle—and these are Belvoir (for the home woods), Three Queens (whence a gallop over the light plough and easy fences of what they term their "heath country" may generally be looked for), Denton Hall and Harlaxton Hall—the two latter being about midway between Grantham and the kennels. This portion of the country you may well choose for schooling your young horse or for trying your last purchase. But when you get into the Belvoir Vale—a part of which is also comprised in the Monday-and-alternate-Saturday district—you must take out a hunter not only

powerful but well bred; one that can gallop through a deep plough and lift you over a strong fence out of it. For round Plungar, Scrimshaw's Mill, Bottesford, Elton Manor and Staunton—also Allington Hall (all about due north of the Castle) the farmers till their land to the uttermost depths, and gird their fields with stake-and-bounds of the strongest and with ditches dug wide and deep.

On Tuesdays and Fridays hounds are out on their Lincolnshire side—west of Grantham. The best of this is round Folkingham, where there is a wide extent of grass and two capital gorse coverts, called respectively Folkingham Gorse and Heathcote's Gorse. Other famous strongholds in these parts are the Sapperton and Newton Woods, always full of foxes ready to run far and run straight—and the surrounding country being strongly fenced, and carrying a good scent, a bad hunter is of little use here, albeit you have none of the crowd of the Leicestershire side to compete against. A timber jumper is a *sine quâ non* to safe conveyance, as post-and-rails are much in favour for hedge-repair. With a fairly good and fast hunter you may see as much sport hereabouts as anywhere in the Duke's country; for there are no rivers (nor for that matter any *brooks*—so you may save the water jumper of your stable for elsewhere), no canals, and at present no railway to hinder the progress or divert a fox's course. Lenton Village, Weaver's Lodge and Newton Bar are the most likely fixtures.

In the southern portion of this Lincolnshire country are fine large woods, which in former days swarmed with foxes and were thought of in connection with

little else. Nowadays there is usually a fox; but the pheasants crowd Reynard out terribly; and the tube of iron gives a more welcome sound to the native ear than the horn of brass. In nearly every other part of the Belvoir country there is a good stock of foxes.

An eastward boundary is formed by the fens of Lincolnshire — an unhuntable tract running up to Boston—but on the north of Folkingham and still in close propinquity of Grantham come Aswarby (Sir Thomas Whichcote's), Culverthorpe, Dembleby Thorns, and Haydor Southards—places full of foxes wild and good. Long runs are the rule rather than the exception; for these foxes travel well, and take some catching over the heavy ploughs which characterise the neighbourhood. And yet, when thoroughly wet, these ploughs maintain a good scent.

Still more to the north we get to Rauceby, where foxes are also well cared for. From Rauceby to Leadenham is again heath land, divided by stone walls into fields of from fifty to one hundred acres. Its scent lies best on it when dry—and with a scent on it hounds can often run clean away from horses. So here your requirements in the matter of horseflesh are again diversified, and blood becomes more an essential than bone.

Leadenham is one of the boundary marks between the Belvoir and the Blankney, and Colonel Reeve finds foxes for both. Dipping into the lower country west of Leadenham we find ourselves in as strong a grass country as it is desirable to ride over; and from Stubton Gorse the Belvoir have scored as many nice gallops of late years as from any covert in the hunt.

they do from start to finish. Of three hundred men at the start from a covertside, possibly half are imbued with this desire. Lucky the hounds and the huntsman, if *they* are allowed to get clear—before the thundering mass bursts forward in pursuit, and dashes itself against the first fence. In this fence there may, with luck, be half a dozen practicable openings. Half a dozen men are over in *no* time, two dozen more are over in *fair* time, while ten dozen others—taking their turn, as they can, with courtesy, snatch it—are over by the time hounds are well out of view. The same scene, in a modified or, it may be concentrated, form, repeats itself at the next fence and at others in quick succession—till soon the half dozen are sailing along as near the pack as they can be, or ought to be; and a moiety of the next two dozen are close enough in their wake to obtain an occasional glimpse of a tail hound. Of the eleven dozen, a few have fallen, some have funked, many have taken a false turn, and the rest follow on—either complacently ready to chime in again at a first check, or dismally conscious that they have seen nothing of what they came out to see. How many then of the three hundred can fairly be said to have been with hounds in this fifteen minutes' burst? *Six* are there to pull up when a first check occurs! But the dozens of raging sportsmen in pursuit know nothing of the check, till, in their joy at having caught the leaders, they sweep round and pass the hounds; and unless the huntsman is quick and decided the chances are that these fifteen minutes constitute the whole of the run.

That this picture is a true and fair sample of what constantly, though by no means invariably, occurs, we could give countless instances to prove. But having sketched it for the double purpose of making the stranger aware of what he must be prepared to meet, and of showing (in all charity towards our neighbours' self-estimate and our own) how impossible it is for the very keenest of us to be always "*with hounds,*" in the thorough sense of the term—we may add that, for men by habit and constitution fitted to take their part in such a scene, there are few things in life more enjoyable than the short sharp scurries of the Belvoir, over the closely fenced meadows of their Melton country.

Take Coston covert, and the grass line (for there are two oft-travelled and widely differing routes) to Woodwell Head! Seventeen more cheery minutes never sweetened existence! Turn from the southern extremity to the northernmost of this the more fashionable section of the Belvoir territory, and ride a twenty minutes from Mr. Sherbrooke's covert to the Curate! Be fortunate enough to pick a plum on either of these occasions; and your palate, once treated to such fruit, will be greedy for a return to the exhilarating food—nor grudge a score of failures in the quest!

To leave generalities and turn to detail. From Grantham, then (for at present we are only considering Melton indirectly, and from such a light as its vicinity and attributes may affect the visitor to Grantham), you will find yourself every Wednesday and each alternate Saturday, wending your way

either straight towards the little metropolis, or meeting its contingent at some point a few miles north or south of the road between the two places. On these days Croxton Park, just midway from either town, is the meet nearest to Grantham. Waltham village, being only half a mile away, may be taken as virtually the same fixture—the same coverts being commanded by each. To specify absolutely *which* coverts are drawn from any particular meet of the Belvoir is a thing not to be attempted. Could we do so we might, at the very least, expect a hat sent round for us at Melton alone—in that many a double five-mile trot would be saved to a band of men who have suffered long. A rule, well grounded, is in force with the Belvoir, that their meets never designate any special or foreknown draw. Not many years ago they lost some valuable hounds by poison, laid down in a covert, which we may now leave unnamed, by the fiendish hands of one who took the opportunity of their meeting close by, to wreak his malice thus. Since then they invariably meet wide of the coverts they propose to draw. After this lapse of time there can be no indiscretion in linking with the leading places of rendezvous those coverts which we have more often seen visited in connection. Thus from Croxton Park and Waltham (the adjacent gorse of Croxton Lings and the wood of Bescaby Oaks being, as a rule, left for the afternoon) hounds are generally taken Melton-wards to try Stonesby Gorse, Newman's Gorse, Freeby Wood, and Brentingby Spinneys. Freeby Wood is not more than a fifty-acre stronghold, the others are quite little coverts, and it is not

often that more than two have to be searched in succession for a find. Merry spins, pre-eminent for pace, delightful in country, but too often deficient in distance, are constantly witnessed from these spots. Foxes from hence seldom make a wide point; men know this well, and lance themselves forth with a will for a flying race—while the Belvoir pack drive their game with such venom that even a stout fox could scarcely keep his head straight for long.

Or, again, you may hear the word given for Mr. Burbage's Covert or Melton Spinney, which Meltonians would perhaps rather see drawn than any other coverts in his Grace's Hunt—by no means on account of their propinquity to home. Mr. Burbage's famous covert lies close beside the river Wreake, a mile or so from Melton, and from it foxes have the pick of some of the prettiest of the Quorn, Cottesmore, and Belvoir countries—the covert being placed in a loop where the boundaries of the three hunts touch. By crossing the river (at the ford convenient) a fox often pierces by Great Dalby into the Quorn, or by Stapleford or Burrough into the Cottesmore territory. From Melton Spinney a bad fox may lead you a short turn over plough, or a good one take you far afield over good grass right or left of Melton. Either case must be conditional on your not being left behind at the covert, with the hundred or so who invariably are, and on your horse being just bold enough for the Melton brook—a little stream that a polo-pony might jump without difficulty, but yet is often full of the highest-priced horses in England.

To return to Bescaby Oaks—an evening fox is always found there when applied for: and in most instances he will carry you towards your Grantham dinner-table. A light soil which is but little worse going than grass, and fences of the easiest, would carry you down to Stoke Pasture, or you may find yourself at Buckminster Park with some fine grass between you and Skillington.

Stonesby is most frequently the meet for Sproxton Thorns and Coston Covert. Goadby Marwood may, or may not, mean Goadby Gorse or Goadby Bullamore and Scalford Bogs. From Piper Hole, the coverts overhanging the Vale of Belvoir are drawn, commencing either with the plantations stretching along the Harby Hills, or with Piper Hole Gorse, or Clawson Thorns. From the last-named, or from Holwell Mouth (neutral with the Quorn), often results a pretty gallop over the Vale—here in its greenest and most tempting form. Saxelby Spinney and Grimston Gorse are also neutral; and when once again relieved from the desolating presence of the swarms of navvies at work on the new railway, will, as before, open the way to the heart of the Quorn Monday country.

In the Vale itself, Hose Grange and Harby are meets leading to the two small coverts that belong to these villages respectively. From these a westerly wind may, literally, treat to the ignominy of sending you to Jericho across a deep and miry tract. To find ourselves in its neighbourhood has usually been sufficient to turn us homewards. But Mr. Sherbrooke's Gorse Covert, situate in the extreme corner of the

Vale, has every charm of position. From here to Holwell Mouth, to Dalby Wood, or over the deep and terrifying Smite to the Curate—each of these lines is superb; each should be done, even with slight divergence on the way, in from twenty to thirty minutes; and each and all of them, on a scenting day, demand a horse that is bold and quick and stout.

Indeed, to sum up all we have said on the subject of the horse to carry you with the Belvoir hounds, it may be written that you want a good one to live with them anywhere—but especially *must* you have a good one, and ride him straight and quick, if you would be with them in their Melton country. Moreover, as the Duke of Rutland in his generosity offers you your sport for nothing, you may well afford to give an extra fifty pounds for your Wednesday horse—and, out of gratitude to his Grace, to abstain from riding over his hounds.

THE SOUTH WOLD.*

Proceeding with the Hunts of Lincolnshire (a county termed by a good hound-authority the "home of the foxhound") we may next take the South Wold. If not a fashionable country, it is at least a sporting one. Perhaps, too, its fame suffers rather than benefits from the fact of its position being in such close contiguity and comparison with packs like the Brocklesby, Blankney, Belvoir, and Fitzwilliam. In the maintenance of a country, the development of its pack and of its resources generally, an autocracy (and, more than all, an hereditary autocracy) has ever been more successful than any representative style of government. A country that has for generations been a cherished heirloom, is sure to enjoy and retain a reputation, far more distinguished than any "Subscription Pack," however highly supported, may hope to become *permanently* possessed of. Fox-hunting *admits* of a republic, where oligarchy cannot be obtained; but it thrives better where the reins of government—and with them pride of possession and system of management—are passed down from father to son. Under a committee *seldom*, under an indi-

* "Stanford's Railway and Hunting Map," sheet 10.

vidual vested with temporary authority *often*, it may be brilliant for a time—for a generation, perhaps. But as a Mastership lapses, radical changes of management naturally follow. No traditional and well tried code survives. The newcomer inherits none of the interests of his predecessor; has no object in carrying out his half-completed reforms, follows not his aims, and possibly disagrees *in toto* with his ideas. In all probability he has never been brought up to, or even initiated into, hound-work or the mysteries of kennel; the management of a country is a book into whose pages he has never been called upon to dip (if its very existence ever occurred to him before); while as to the tact and diplomacy required at the hands of an M.F.H., he has at starting neither conception nor natural aptitude. For the Master of a Subscription Pack is, more often than not, one who, by accident of birth or virtue of acquirement, has already wealth (most likely county property) to recommend him to his neighbours, and to whom the further advantage of being looked up to as the Master of their Hounds has an irresistible charm. The distinction is well worth the few hundreds, which a liberal subscription leaves as a yearly deficit; and so, not necessarily with any single better recommendation, he becomes, as opportunity offers, Master of an old-established pack of Fox Hounds. It does not take him a year or two to find that the rosy-looking bed into which he has cast himself is not without thorns many and sharp—while the buzz of disturbed prejudices and the sting of local jealousies show him that there are mosquitoes round

his couch of which he never dreamed. So holding up his head bravely, as if unconscious of disappointment, he fulfils his duties with much outward satisfaction, till such time as he can advance a plausible reason for relinquishing them; then shifts his load on to another's shoulders, just as he had begun to learn how it should be carried. The same process is enacted in the person of his successor; and so a Subscription Pack is bandied from hand to hand every few years. Huntsmen seldom remain long to serve a succession of masters; and under the vicissitudes of variety of *régime* and frequent change of system, hounds can scarcely be expected to improve, or even to maintain a fair standard once acquired—still less can each of these short-lived Masterships sustain a fresh pack, of respectable quality, where the country possesses no hounds of its own. Fox-hunting confessedly lives on its traditions and by sufferance. But its traditions are a stronger power, and offer a more solid foothold, where for generations past they have been linked with the fortunes of a leading family, whose name is indigenous to the soil. In *such* case sufferance has been so long and so unhesitatingly granted as to have become a fixed principle, which it would be considered the rankest heresy to call into question—much more to disturb. But the opposite case is open to contingencies so numerous and diversified, that they are beyond our space and present object. Every Master of a Subscription Hunt must have been brought into unpleasant contact with many of them, and will probably find it no difficult task to amplify his list day by day.

These few remarks should, however, in some degree support the opinion that a Subscription Country has scarcely the same chance of permanent distinction as one whose progress is co-existent with, ruled and supported by, the hereditary leaders of local society.

The South Wold is an instance of an old-established Subscription Pack, which—though long and well-established—has not acquired (or at all events has failed to retain) a name of note comparable with that held by its more eminent neighbours. It can boast of advantages of soil and situation more than equal to theirs (the Belvoir excepted); but while they have gone on steadily flourishing, the South Wold has had many a struggle for bare existence. With the ups and downs of its past career we have nothing to do. In this year of '78 its present is vigorously cared for, and its future promises well. And now we may proceed to tell you how to reach it, if you have a mind to hunt with the South Wold, and convey some notion of what you will find when you get there.

North and north-west of the Belvoir the upper portion of Lincolnshire is hunted in something approaching to a square by the four packs, the Brocklesby, the Burton, the Blankney and the South Wold. Of this square the Brocklesby monopolise nearly the northern half. Of the remaining half the Burton and Blankney take the west between them, the South Wold all the east (as will be seen by Stanford's Map).

The geological features of this square of country

For, though coloured down to the sea, only a comparatively small part of the Marsh is available for hunting purposes.

Again the members of the Hunt use the term *wold* as distinctly applying by no means to the whole of this high land, but only to the very open and undulating miles of arable that from Louth (the northernmost point of their country proper) is found right and left of the Louth-and-Horncastle-road, to within three miles of the last named town.

Horncastle is quite the most central base of operations from which to hunt with the South Wold Hounds, being near the middle of their country, about four miles from the Kennels, and within easy reach by road of all their meets. It is a town of some 5000 inhabitants, is 130 miles from London, and attainable by the Great Northern Railway in four hours and a half. Hotel and stable accommodation are to be found in full.

Spilsby and Alford (on the east of the Hunt) are almost exactly a similar distance from London by the same line of railway. Louth is another half hour's journey, is a larger town than either of the other three; and is a capital place for anyone wishing to divide his hunting between the Brocklesby and the South Wold.

The kennels (which, with the hounds, are the property of the Hunt) are built beside the Louth and Horncastle Road, opposite the village of Bletchford; and stand there in unsheltered solitude as if to remark to the passer-by how bleak and lonely is this wild

wold tract. Within them are some five and fifty couple of hounds, with which to hunt four days a week.

These four days we may classify as pertaining to their Louth, Horncastle, Hainton and Spilsby districts respectively; and treat them accordingly.

On Mondays they are in their Louth country (the river Withern being held as separating it from their Saturday, or Spilsby, country)—and some of their chief meets are Tothill, Burwell, Haugham-Guide-post, Belchford, Kenwick and Elkington. Of these Tothill is a meet for the large woods adjacent which overlook the Marsh (and similar woods, it may be remarked, are to be found southwards all along the edge of the wold). Burwell, Haugham, and Maltby here form a chain of woodland from which it is often difficult to drive a fox; though now-and-again hounds get away eastward towards Carlton in the Middle Marsh (over a fair sporting country) or westwards over the open wolds on the Withcall side.

Belchford and Kenwick are for the Wolds pure and simple, where foxes swarm and are to be found even more easily in the pits and turnip fields than in the coverts themselves. For the latter are small plantations and gorses; and foxes, a few times disturbed, are apt to show a preference for the open. The farmers soon discover their haunts; and a large proportion of their good runs have been to the credit of outlying foxes. With hounds running fast over these trying hills, your horse must be able to gallop and stay, even if he cannot jump; and blood is the first desideratum. The same remarks apply to the Wold

country all round Louth—that about Elkington being neutral with the Brocklesby, as we shall have to notice farther on. Ploughed fields of many acres, hills of considerable gradient, and fences of little moment are the most prominent characteristics of the true wolds throughout.

To continue with detail which, purely local in its character and necessarily of little interest to the general reader, must yet make up the chief bulk of what is intended as a work of reference—we enter upon the Horncastle district. This is hunted on Tuesdays and has a greater variety and perhaps pleasanter features than the high wold country of which we have just spoken. It touches the latter at the Kennels and Oxcombe, which we may take as the northern points in the Tuesday circle, of which Horncastle is practically the centre. The coverts of Oxcombe, with Manvers' Gorse at Belchford may, likely enough, from the above meets, keep you on the open wolds all day. But, proceeding southward we come to Fulletby, West Ashby (with its gorse and spinnies), Greatham and Winceby—the coverts to be drawn being chiefly small natural plantations and copses, with a gorse here and there. The country immediately round West Ashby and Horncastle is some of the best in the Hunt—all, or nearly all, grass, divided into little fields by strong thorn fences. And here you must have a horse, who can jump big and be quick on his legs to jump again. A long striding horse would be out of place, where a short-backed animal would dip lightly in and out of the narrow meadows, as a fishing smack makes little of a

chopping sea. Below Horncastle we have Moorby and East Kirkby (for Revesby). From Revesby commenced the best day's sport of the season '77-'78—embracing two fair kills in the open, the one after an hour and twenty minutes from Revesby Park *viâ* Enderby and Raithby to Hundleby, the other (with only half an hour's breathing time) after fifty minutes from Keal, *viâ* Eresby Mount, Hundleby, and Sausthorpe round to Enderby. These two runs took place over ground good enough for any shire of higher name: for the line was on grass nearly throughout, the fences were big and fair, and the pace was great. The previous season their best run was also from Keal—being an hour and twenty minutes and a kill, and covering an immense amount of ground in the time. On that occasion they went by Enderby, past Lusby, crossed the Horncastle and Spilsby road between Hackworthingham and Horncastle, and after a wide sweep almost to South Ormsby ran into their fox below Sutterby. The point from find to finish was nearly eight miles and whole line quite thirteen or fourteen. But these runs in reality all took place in their Friday (Spilsby) district, though we have mentioned them incidentally in connection with Revesby which supplied the material for the one first-quoted.

Working round south of Horncastle we may note the meets of Tumby Gate and Martin Railway Bridge—for the woods of Highall Bracken and Waterloo. From Bracken Wood hounds occasionally run across a stretch of moorland and into some better country round Tattershall. From Horsington Mill they draw

the same horseshoe-shaped chain of woodlands back to Martin Railway Bridge. These woods are admirably preserved as regards pheasants: and for that matter ground game (with the single exception of Reynard) is thoroughly encouraged. When *he* is to be found, you should be on a hunter; for, though on most days you may afford to lounge about the woods on a pony, if by chance hounds run into the open you will meet with wide ditches and strong fences.

West of Horncastle Thimbleby is a favourite meet, with a view to drawing Edlington Scrubs and the Edlington and Wispington Plantations, which lie in the midst of a very pretty, but limited, range of grass country. The fences hereabouts are mostly of thorn, neatly trimmed and (as is the case over the bulk of Lincolnshire) usually set on a narrow bank, only a foot or two in height—but all that height additional.

Thursday is the day on which they hunt their northern, or Hainton, district—most of the meets being for the neutral woods between Louth and Market Rasen. These great coverts really belong to the Brocklesby; but during the late Lord Yarborough's life, permission was given to the South Wold and Burton to draw them (in some measure to relieve the strain from the Brocklesby due to the wide extent of their country). Of the meets in this district Donnington Brick Yard is in the South Wold proper; but Hainton, Boucherest Arms, Six Hills, Legsby, and Gersby are all for the neutral woods. Hainton Duck Ponds, Legsby Wood and the woods

of Linwood — North Wood, Bleasby Wood, and Eleanor Wood are the chief of these, and lie on sandy and hilly ground. The neutral zone extends by Gersby, South Elkington, Welton, and North Elkington, the easterly portion consisting, as before-mentioned, altogether of open wold.

On Fridays the South Wold are in their Spilsby district. Owing to fen and marsh they are shut off from hunting at any distance from that town to the south or east: consequently all their Friday meets lie north or west of it. If we commence on the westward, these are Enderby Cross Roads (or more frequently Raithby) for the plantations of Enderby and Keal and Raithby Gorse—and a fox from any of these three should adopt as pleasant a line as in the runs just instanced. Harrington is a meet, and the Harrington and Langton Coverts might hold foxes enough to allow it to be almost a weekly one. Of late years a speedy adjournment has usually been made to Mr. Burton's two coverts at Somersby, known as New England and Burton Gorse, and which have been quite the saving clause of this part of the country. Ormsby is the rendezvous for Ormsby Wood and Dryby Carr, whence hounds generally draw on towards Thoresby and the big woods overlooking the Marsh. Ulceby Cross Roads is chosen as a usual fixture for the woods of Well Vale, Rigsby and Haugh. From Well Vale foxes almost always persist in running into Welton Wood, a covert of 300 acres in extent, from which they may sometimes be persuaded to break on towards Gunby and Boothby. Greenfield and Woodthorpe are for the lower woods

of Greenfield and neighbourhood, whence they hunt over the Middle Marsh as far as the dykes will allow.

It was round and about these woods that, towards the end of last season hounds ran uninterruptedly from 5.30 till 8.45—the last hour and a half being of course in complete darkness, and their followers only reaching the hounds when suddenly and inexplicably the music ceased. The pack were found all together a field from Greenfield Wood and reached the kennels at 11.30 that night. Welton Guide Post and Gunby Cross Roads are for Welton Wood and the Gunby coverts just above the Marsh, and for the Boothby plantations on the lower ground. A strong covert at Halton Holgate would utilise a very fine piece of grass country now seldom ridden over; and would often induce foxes to take a line under the hills to, or from, Welton Wood on the one side and Keal on the other. But as there is little likelihood of any man of wealth coming forward to purchase the land for the Hunt (which is itself by no means rich), and as no one has yet discovered a substitute for gorse or blackthorn that in its growth will pay its own rent, Halton New Covert as yet scarcely takes rank as an immediate probability.

This Friday country possesses a great stock of foxes in its woodlands, where the shooting interests might with more reason be expected to clash with those of foxhunting, but which, on the contrary, put to shame certain manors in the centre of the open country, whose proprietors would rather their few acres of covert should hold twenty pheasants and no

fox, than nineteen pheasants and fun for their neighbours.

It should be concluded from what we have said that the South Wold is, on the whole, a very sporting country. Given a sufficient rainfall, it seldom fails to carry a scent, whether in the open or the woodlands. Though chiefly plough, there is here and there a twenty minutes' patch of grass, over and above the deep drained stretches of the Marsh. And, by the way, that foxes have now and again run for their lives wide over the tracts of fen and marsh, we have proof in a letter now beside us, which takes us back to the days when Sir Richard Sutton hunted both the Burton and South Wold. We learn that "nearly fifty years ago" hounds once ran from Keal straight across the fens and killed their fox at Sibsey within four miles of Boston. Jack Shirley was the huntsman, and was left half way in one of the open drains Only three men rode to the finish. One of these was Mr. Short of Edlington, who jumped every practicable drain in the line—his horse being still fresh enough to bring him home that evening.

In conclusion, a bad horse will neither do for the South Wold nor for any other part of Lincolnshire; for, though you may see a certain amount of sport on an indifferent one—fences, as a rule, being easy, and the field not big enough for individuals to get much in each other's way—yet when hounds really run, you ought to have both blood and bone under you to live with them. The farmers are fully alive to this—and though, apparently, they breed nothing like the number of horses *for sale* that they used to, they still

take care, in most instances, to keep thoroughbred ones for their own riding. In twenty minutes over the Wolds your steed will surely tell you, in unmistakable language, if his grandsire's name was Smiler (as Custance so aptly put it); for only a clean, or nearly-clean bred one can climb the hills or breast the plough till hounds run into their fox.

THE BROCKLESBY.*

So many of the previous remarks as to conformation and requirements of country apply equally to the Brocklesby as to the South Wold, that, instead of repeating them, it will merely be necessary to point out *en passant* those to which we refer. It will be remembered that we described the Marsh and the Wolds as running side by side up to the Humber. The Brocklesby country includes also the other two parallel sections in the formation of North Lincolnshire, to wit, the Cliff and the Intermediate Vale. But wide as is its extent on paper, its hunting area is in practice virtually narrowed to little more than the Wold and the Marsh. For down the centre of this Intermediate Valley, between the Wold and the Cliff, runs the Ankholm River or New Navigation Canal; and westward of this hounds are seldom advertised to meet — Kirton Station and Grayingham being among the exceptions. Again, the North East portion of the vale—near the mouth of the canal, is rendered unserviceable by the presence of large open drains.

What has already been said regarding the character

* *Vide* "Stanford's Railway and Hunting Map," sheet 10.

of the wold and marsh country farther south, applies equally to this Hunt as to the South Wold; and on these points description would be but repetition. But, as ranking highest in historical fame and pride of position—not only in Lincolnshire but among all England—the Brocklesby tower over their neighbours. Longer even than the Belvoir have they been the care and cherished property of one family; and each Lord Yarborough in turn has done his utmost to keep the famous Brocklesby blood from losing anything of caste or high degree. History has to do with our present subject only in its results: and so we may limit allusion to the past to the fact that this constant hereditary care has produced a pack of hounds, worthy of a journey twice as long as to North Lincolnshire—if only to look upon them in the Kennel. To hunt with them go to Louth; or better still, secure stabling at Limber Magna, which is quite close to the Kennels.

Louth is some five hours from London (by Great Northern Railway), and, though at first glance it would scarcely appear to recommend itself as an accessible hunting quarter, the journey is really no more difficult or tedious than to Melton Mowbray —man and beasts being conveyed almost without stoppage to their journey's end. Once there, you are in a position to command a choice of hunting and a very first-class pack, without any of the inconveniences incidental to a more fashionable centre.

By road and easy rail, the Brocklesby and South Wold offer five or even six days a week between them —their respective days being as follows: On Mondays

the two packs will often embarrass you by both meeting in the neighbourhood of Louth—under which circumstances you must just "gang yer ain gait" and follow your inclination. On Tuesday you have the South Wold in their Horncastle district. On Wednesdays you may take train to Grimsby and hunt with the Brocklesby in their country between the kennels and that town. On Thursday you may ride the glades of the neutral woods about Hainton with the South Wold. On Friday you may possibly find yourself in the same merry woods with the Brocklesby, or be following them over their West Wold country—or, again, you may, if you wish, start from home an hour earlier to jog your hunter (half an hour to gallop your hack) towards Spilsby to hunt with the South Wold. On Saturdays you must either take train up to Brocklesby, or stay at home to make up your accounts.

Should you fix your headquarters at Limber Magna (on most maps anglicised to our comprehensions as Great Limber) you will have to confine your operations altogether to the Brocklesby, save when now and again you take the ferry over the Humber and throw in your luck with the Holderness. Great Limber is four miles from Stallingborough Station—about 5½ hours from London, by way of Grimsby and the Great Northern Railway. From here you would follow hounds to covert four days a week without having to make use of the train. Take with you the same class of horse already noted as suitable to carry you with the South Wold; be quick at getting away when the Brocklesby are once on to their fox; and, if you

mean business, you will see a great deal of sport without having to ride desperately. The country is mostly plough—a great part of it wold (in the full sense of our previous definition). There are few woods of any size, except the neutral ones between Louth and Market Rasen; but the coverts generally are small and foxes seldom hang long in them. The number of resident gentry in the Brocklesby country is curiously small, and the bulk of the field is made up of farmers well-to-do, well mounted and thoroughly fond of the sport. Some seventy couples of puppies are every year sent out to walk, all or nearly all of which are taken by the tenants of Lady Yarboro'. Never, it should here be remarked, have the pack and the country been an object of greater solicitude than to Her Ladyship—their present ruler; who, besides always riding well to the front and watching her hounds in the field, has made them a study in the kennel, and so gains a double pleasure from being able to discern each individual of the pack as he developes at his work and in appearance.

Proceeding now to specify some of their meets and consequent draws—we have to repeat that on Mondays the Brocklesby are usually in the southern part of their country, between Louth and Grimsby, which is all either wold or Middle Marsh. On the wold they meet at Elkington, Wyham, Cadeby, Binbrook, Thorganby, Wold Newton, &c. All these are within half a dozen miles of Louth, and all have good coverts handy—Elkington being for the plantations surrounding and Agthorpe Wood; Cadeby and Wyham for Wyham Gorse and Hell Furze; while Binbrook,

Thorganby and Wold Newton have Wold Newton Gorse, Thorganby Covert, Croxby Pond and Gorse, &c. In the Middle Marsh (which is much heavier going than the wolds, and is here almost entirely plough) there is Brackenbury and its covert, Utterby, Grainsby, and, farther north, Bradley and its woods.

On Wednesdays hounds are out in the upper part of the Middle Marsh—in fact, their country on this day is included within the points of New Holland (on the Humber), Brocklesby, Swallow, Barnetby, Grimsby, and the sea coast. And the Middle Marsh here developes itself into their best country, in the form of rich pasturage and stiff fences—over which a hunter of high class, and only such an one, will carry you.

Grimsby, by the way, is another base you might choose for your sport with the Brocklesby—though, unless you happen to be much interested in docks, or wish to follow a second pursuit in the shape of sea fishing, it is scarcely a quarter we should recommend to a hunting man. New Holland, Thornton College, Newsam Lodge, Aylesby Mill, Immingham, Weelsby House, Laceby, and Barnetby Beck, are included in this day's meets; and the coverts are chiefly small (such as Houlton Covert near Immingham), though exceptions, such as Raxton Wood, are to be found.

On Fridays they more often hunt on the west of their wold country, or work the southern woods which as above-mentioned, have been thrown open also to the South Wold and the Burton. Moortown, Normanby, and Stainton-le-Hole are meets on the edge of the wolds, and Swallow is a village on the

centre of the high ground which is often named as a rendezvous. From the former places a choice is had of either drawing the upland coverts of Stainton (plantations), Swinhope Gorse, Rothwell, &c., or of dipping into the lower country for Normanby Clump, Claxby Wood, and the Usselby and Osgodby Plantations. On the flat below are Owersby, Kingerby, &c., with a wood near the latter place; while Linwood Warren and Gersby Manor are among the most common fixtures for the big neutral woods. The pleasures of woodland hunting are measured entirely by the accident of individual taste; and call for no comment at our hands. Supposing you to possess a fondness for this, the wilder and more classic phase of foxhunting, you may here indulge your predilections to the full—leading an almost forest life under the joint auspices of the Brocklesby, South Wold and Burton. With foxes enough for all, these glades and dells are ringing every other day to the stirring sounds of hound and horn.

Farther westward, and beyond the New Navigation Canal, hounds are taken occasionally to the neighbourhood of Kirton and Grayingham—for Grayingham Gorse and Blyborough Covert, &c. North of these places are various woods; but the fixture-card seldom points in their direction. The lower country is of a rather deep character (being stiff clay); and carries a good scent. Above Kirton you get on to the Cliff—an inferior scenting tract, and lighter going.

Saturdays are generally employed in working the country round, and to the north of Brocklesby. In

the neighbourhood of the Park are numerous plantations, and Hendel Wood, close by, is of considerable size. Wootton Hall is a favourable meet some four miles northward, and all up the wold to the Humber they have a great deal of sport. By no means one of the least merits of the Brocklesby country is that it is well stocked with foxes almost throughout. The foxes are wild and ready to travel, and there are few parts of the country which do not carry at least a fair scent.

THE BURTON AND THE BLANKNEY.*

Not only may Lincoln be set down as their common centre; but we may go so far as to add that no other available base offers itself, from which to hunt in either country. Again, the area of each being limited, all the meets of both are within reach of the cathedral town; and you will find excellent hunting on all sides. Both possess hounds of high repute; both are well stocked with foxes; and both are well and liberally managed. The Burton hounds claim a strong relationship with the Grove while taking their foundation from a pack brought from Mr. Chaplin some half dozen years ago. The Blankney, with a variety of blue blood in their veins, have been bred to a type which stands quite alone. For fashion and class Mr. Chaplin's present hounds shine out as distinctly apart from ordinary packs, as racehorses among hunters. Blood and breeding are relied upon as the root and source of all needful qualities; and it is claimed on their behalf that in the field they are wanting in none of the virtues possessed by coarser bred hounds. Moreover, that when a more plebeian class begins to tire in the late afternoon, these are

* *Vide* "Stanford's Railway and Hunting Map," sheet 10.

only at their best. It is argued, in fact, that to the hound as much as to the horse applies the aphorism that an ounce of blood is worth a pound of bone. To what extent this may be successfully carried, we do not pretend to say. Certain it is that the experiment is here a high one: and so far from any failure being recorded, the theory is maintained to be proved. It is asserted that no virtue has been lost, no power of wear and tear sacrificed; but that, like a thoroughbred horse, a hound of this type has twice the endurance of one of meaner blood and more cumbrous build. Bone, *bone down to the feet*, has been the common kennel cry of late years; and every hound-show has seen the judges more exacting than before on this point. But you would go to the Blankney kennels rather to look upon beautiful heads and necks, to fill your eye with clean-cut shoulders, and to see high breeding typified. Drive and dash are, perhaps, their most conspicuous characteristics in the field; though, that selection has not induced these qualities only, to the extinction of others equally important, may quickly be gathered by watching them on a cold-scenting afternoon. That is the time to which their admirers point, as proving the truth of the principles on which the pack has been built. "That is the time," they say, "which shows how blood can stay!"

Both kennels are within easy riding distance of Lincoln—the Burton at Reepham, a station on the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincoln line, four miles to the north-east; the other ten miles to the south-east, at Mr. Chaplin's seat at Blankney. The two countries

were long hunted as one: and, while this was the case Lincoln was almost always chosen as the head-quarters of the master. Sir Richard Sutton lived there during his term of office; so did Lord Henry Bentinck; and so did Mr. Chaplin, when he kept two packs and found eight days sport in the week for the country. Indeed, whether as master, or as one independent of all ties of place or position, it would be difficult to point to any other spot to pitch your tent with a view to hunting with the two packs.

Lincoln is less than three hours and a half from King's Cross. Be careful how you handle Bradshaw when you meditate a first visit there: or the Great Northern may entice you an hour further round by Spalding and Boston. Your way is by Peterboro and Grantham, and by this route you may practise your eye all the while over a hunting country, before coming once again into more active contact with the half-forgotten fences. Thus may you brush off much of the six months' rust that have accumulated on your perception, sharpen again the instinct that was before so keen, revive your memory, and reanimate the spirit that for months has lain dormant.

The Burton and Blankney countries are in many respects very similar. The high tableland known as the Cliff runs north and south through both of them; and so does the stiff clay valley between it and the wolds. Light plough, divided by stone walls into fields of many acres, covers the limestone of the Cliff, which is much narrower in the Burton country (in parts only three or four miles across) than where it

opens out in the Blankney country into the Lincoln Heath. As a rule the lower ground carries a better scent than the Cliff. Both countries have also a fair sprinkling of grass, especially (as we may have to notice by and bye) the Blankney, where west of the Cliff they border on the Belvoir.

The map will show you at a glance that the Burton hunt north of Lincoln, the Blankney to the south—the River Witham being more or less the boundary between the two, and the Trent limiting both on the west. The map, however, as at present issued, fails to show that the Wragby woodlands are virtually neutral ground—forming a great stand-by to both Hunts. They always contain a supply of the material, generally carry a hot scent, and their rides, as a rule, are quite as good as big woods can be expected to contain.

The whole chain of the Wragby woodlands and the country as far west as the river Langworth and as far north as the Lincoln and Horncastle road, is hunted at the present time by both packs (with the exception of Vyner's Gorse and the few coverts in the neighbourhood of Gautby). There are Southery, New Park, Austacre, Hatton, Chambers', Stainfield, West, Keyes, and Bullingdon Woods, and Newbold Common. The Blankney hunt them one day a week (usually Wednesday), the Burton sometimes two (Mondays and Tuesdays). Keyes Wood and West Wood are often deep after rain and when well trodden; but on the whole, every care is taken that riding through these woods should be a feasible and, as much as possible, a pleasant matter—which, as hounds ever

go through them with a determined head, is of some importance.

Friday is the only day in the week on which neither pack is out. For the others, the Burton hunt Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday; the Blankney Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday.

The Burton are on Mondays, as we have said, often in the Wragby woodlands. Often, however, they advertise for the extreme north of their country, where Magin Moor and Caenby Corner are two of their favourite meets. From the former they have Yawthorpe, Harpswell, and Glentworth Coverts, whilst from the latter they have Caenby Wood, Toft Newton, Spridlington Thorns, and Lord Brownlow's Covert. From this last, in Mr. Chaplin's first year of mastership, they had a great run, which ended in the field being entirely beaten off and the pack remaining out all night. This was on a Tuesday, and the last hound came in on Saturday morning. They killed their fox by themselves in a covert called Doglands, where at eleven o'clock a keeper found them sleeping round the remains of their quarry—an intrusion they resented by driving him and his lantern away. The 5th milestone on the Spital Road is not an uncommon fixture. From it they can draw eastward to Hackthorn and Dunholme Gorse, or westward for Carlton Gorse, Brattleby Thorns or Scampton. Brattleby and Fillingham are also often included in Monday's meets; though no hard and fast rule is laid down for this day or Tuesday; and Wickenby Station, for the famous covert of Wickenby Wood and Holton and Torrington Gorse, occur on the former day. From

Wickenby Wood some years ago they had, on successive Saturdays, two of the best days on record in the annals of Lincolnshire. The one contained a run with a point of eighteen miles, nearly up to Caistor. On the second they had a gallop of extraordinary pace: and it is said that hounds covered an eight-mile point in thirty-two minutes! And it is further related as a fact that, in the last field their fox turned back stone-blind from exhaustion, and cantered right in among the hounds. Some of the trysting places in the woods of the Wragby neighbourhood are (on either Monday and Tuesday) Clay Bridge, for Stainton Wood and so on; Stainfield Hall, Apley, Langworth Bridge, Newbold Common, &c. On Tuesdays, too, they often meet quite near Lincoln. Greetwell is frequently chosen; as from it they can either draw Fiskerton Long Wood or northwards to Barlings, Sudbrooke and Dunholme Gorse. At Stainton is a wood celebrated for the stoutness of its foxes. From it the Burton had, last season, some of their longest and best runs; and not unfrequently found themselves carried to the far extremity of the Wragby woodlands. In fact, they had nothing better than on one snowy day, when the ground appeared barred against hunting, and only one or two men attended the meet. Yet, with scarcely a check, they ran from Stainton Wood, past Wragby, just clear of the big woods, and killed at Edlington—only the second whip and one other rider accomplishing the line taken by hounds.

North of the Wragby woods is a fine wild open country, including a good deal of grass, chiefly in the

neighbourhood of Holton and Torrington—a rich grass vale stretching from Stainton Wood by Holton and Torrington, to Hainton in the South Wold; and this, although a narrow strip, is a line often taken by foxes. Torrington Gorse is a never-failing find. In the season '76-'77 it was drawn not less than thirteen or fourteen times, and always held a fox. It forms, moreover, a link between the Wragby and Linwood woodlands; from one to the other of which both the Burton and the Blankney are constantly running. If they hit off the Torrington valley they may be on grass most of the way; otherwise the journey is over deep plough. But the whole is a wild sporting country; foxes must make a good point; and hounds can go a great pace over it.

On Thursdays the Burton are almost always on the west of their country—in or near the valley of the Trent. This district was at one time entirely grass—little of which, however, has been allowed to survive. Some little remains all along under the western edge of the Cliff; but the bulk of it has been sacrificed to the plough—and, worse than all, to the *steam plough*. To make it more difficult, too, the great thorn fences and wide ditches of the old pastures still exist; so your horse must combine great jumping power with ability to make his way quickly through dirt. And this, indeed, holds good with regard to your mounts for the Burton country throughout. You must ride strong horses, clever horses, and well-bred horses—horses that can travel fast and yet are temperate and powerful withal at their jumps. The country is essentially a deep one—being nearly all

stiff clay except the narrow stretch of heath on the Cliff. It is in parts strongly fenced; and, being a good scenting soil, puts a severe test on a horse as compared with hounds. Among their Thursday meets are Torksey Station, for Brampton Holt and the Fox Covert; Thonock and Lea Hall for the Gainsborough Woods. It should be remarked that the drain running from Torksey to Saxilby is here the boundary between the Burton and the Blankney — leaving Kettlethorpe in the latter country, and not as shown in Stanford's map.

Saturday is generally on the east of the country—Wickenby Station, Linwood, Torrington, and Panton being frequent meets. When at Wickenby they have the above-mentioned celebrated covert, of that name. When at Linwood, they usually draw the big wood in the morning, falling back on Holton and Torrington Gorse for their afternoon fox. From Panton they have the coverts round the house, the Hatton Plantations, &c.—all certain finds. Hungram Gorse, drawn by both Burton and Blankney, gives a very good instance of the merits of an artificial earth. The latter pack had many runs from it last season. If the gorse was drawn blank, a terrier was put into the earth, and without fail there issued a fox—often two, and sometimes three.

The woods of Linwood, though neutral between the Burton, Brocklesby and South Wold, and frequently rattled three times in a week, never fail to show foxes and sport. With a wild country all round, hounds huntsmen and foxes have here a fair field, and are pitted on their merits. Saturdays are thus

frequently marked by long runs into the South Wold country; and Mr. Foljambe had, during last season, a great deal of sport on this side—though his field, never of great dimensions, is by no means at its fullest when the woodlands are to be drawn.

The Blankney country presents a much greater variety than the Burton—embracing, as it does, a less amount of deep plough, a much wider tract of heath, and a more liberal allowance of grass. It will be noticed that fen runs round the north and east of the country. Near this there is solid arable till the vicinity of Blankney is reached. Then comes, conveying its own character, the Heath (or, as we have designated it, the Cliff); while further westward your taste for grass may often be indulged to the full and your love of jumping more than fairly tried.

The days selected for these various conditions, and the places of meeting for each, are much as follows. On Mondays they are out on their Newark side, in which term is comprehended all their country north and north-west of the River Witham as it runs up to Lincoln. Kettlethorpe, Thorney, Doddington (for Skellingthorpe Big Wood and Mr. Jarvis' coverts), are among their most frequent meets: as is also the seventh milestone Newark Road, for Tunman's Wood and Eagle Wood. The last-named was one of the late Sir Richard Sutton's favourite coverts, and is equally valued nowadays. For the same wood they meet at Eagle Hall; the preference however, if anything, being for the Seventh Milestone as entailing a less journey for hounds. Occasionally too, on a Monday, they go to Aubourn Moor, for an afternoon

fox on their way back to kennels. Stapleford Moor is another fixture, and this brings hounds among the large fir coverts and high heather which mark Lord Middleton's property in this neighbourhood. From here, too, they draw the Norton-Disney woods, to both of which the Hunt are very partial, on account of the likelihood of crossing the river into the Broughton district and getting upon the grass towards Wellingore. Very valuable also might these woods be for cub-hunting—but that hounds are not allowed to enter them till late in the season.

Between this point (Norton, &c.) and the River Trent is an apparently nice sporting country (chiefly small grass enclosures); but, owing to the unfriendly disposition of various petty freeholders, there has of late years been much difficulty with regard to foxes, and in consequence hounds are seldom seen there.

The surface soil of the Monday country in the main consists of gravel or sand, which often holds a scent when hounds cannot run a yard over the clay of the lower ground. Such an inconsistency may now and again be noticed, when, on an otherwise perfect hunting day, a loaded or frosty surface causes the heavy plough to "carry," and scent to be completely annulled—when a change to the lighter soil perhaps sets hounds running furiously. Wide ditches, small hedges, and rotten banks, are the leading features of the fences; varied often by a wide dug drain.

The Blankney Wednesdays may be set down as belonging to the Wragby Woodlands. Of these Key's Wood, West Wood, and Chambers' Wood are perhaps the most popular, as being on the borders of

the fine open country to the north: and Tile House Beck, Southery, New Park Wood and Chambers' Wood are the leading meets. These woodlands are so regularly worked by both the packs under notice that the foxes from Wragby are always on the stir, and finding no peace in the Burton coverts at Wickenby are always ready to fly between one quarter and the other. Consequently either seldom fail to give out at least one good fox per diem when called upon: and from the Wragby Woods he always runs northwards, and away from the Blankney Kennels—never crossing the Witham to the south. Stainfield Wood is almost always drawn by the Blankney on Ash Wednesday: and in Lord Henry Bentinck's day was noted as having, several years in succession, commemorated that day with a run of high merit.

Their Thursdays, are generally somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood, or to the east, of Blankney. The chief meets on this day are Blankney itself, Scopwick, Ashby, Nocton—these lying in the deep country between the Heath and the fens (which will be noticed as here stretching down to Boston). Occasional meets on the Heath itself are Temple Bruer (a former possession of the Knights Templar), the Green Man, or now and again Canwick. The Nocton and Blankney Woods are fine coverts; while working southwards we come to the gorses of Blankney, Kirkby Green, Digby, and Bloxholm—all trusty places and almost certain finds. The Bloxholm Coverts are neutral with the Belvoir, which pack also draw Mr. Chaplin's thorn covert at Temple Bruer (known as Crow Bottom). On the Heath days they

have the Green Man Coverts, Bartholomew's Gorse, and the Ashby Coverts (the latter being on the borders of the low ground); while, further west, are the coverts of Temple Bruer and Griffin's (in the centre of the Heath).

In the eastern vale you will ride for the most part over plough, with here and there some grass to stretch your horse. Round Digby is steam plough, and much of it. Round Blankney the farmers have been content to keep the grass intact (and this year, if ever, they should believe that the shorthorn will repay them rather than the ploughshare). As is right, they build their fences frequent, stiff, and honest, and they like to see hounds leading quickly over them.

Below Lincoln the Heath spreads out fan-shaped, till at Temple Bruer it is about its widest. Light plough, stone walls, and no ditches are among its characteristics, to which may be added the fact that, *with a real scent*, hounds can beat horses over it. This is more likely to happen when after rain the ground has become holding even here. In such case horses are hampered, while hounds can go their best, flying the walls as they come, without a moment's stoppage. Then indeed you want blood under you—as you have highest blood racing before you. Yet, taking months and years throughout, the Heath is *not* a great scenting country.

But Saturday is *par excellence the* day of the Blankney. Keep your best horse for it; and smoke one less cigar over night than is your rule. For the meet will surely be for the Wellingore Vale; and

your head must be clear, your heart must be bold, and your horse worthy of the task, if you would cross it in comfort. For a *fair* country there can be no stiffer in England; though to compare it with Mr. Tailby's Vale of Skeffington or with the Pytchley district of Oxenden, would be inapt, inasmuch as a good man and a good horse can ride over Wellingore, while no combinations of virtue will carry a rider systematically to hounds over the other two. A big and determined jumper you want here, and a galloper too; for the Wellingore Vale (all excellent scenting ground) is still mostly grass—at all events towards Leadenham and Broughton, and along under the Cliff. The most common meets are Wellingore, Coleby, Aubourn, Carlton-le-Moorland, and Brant Broughton (which in Lincolnshire they pronounce as Bruton, not as we hear it at the Leicestershire end of the Vale of Belvoir). Wellingore Gorse is perhaps the most famous covert in the Vale; but there are also good thorn coverts at Broughton and Aubourn, and two good gorses at Coleby and Harmston). From Coleby Gorse two years ago hounds scored an extraordinary performance. In twenty-two minutes they covered a five-mile point (their actual course being nearer seven)—then dashing over their fox as he lay down, they went on with a fresh one, and, running him some miles beyond Leadenham, got clean away from huntsman, master, and field, who were scouring the country for hours before coming upon them again. Boothby Park (belonging to Mr. Marfleet) is a certain find, though its sole pretence at covert consists of the laurels round the house, two or

three miniature copses, and an artificial earth. In most of these vale coverts Mr. Chaplin has instituted artificial earths with the greatest success. The system is further continued by having a "fox keeper" (as he is termed), and his terriers, always out with hounds — then if the covert be drawn blank, the grating of the earth is removed, the terriers put in, and a fox usually bolted. This plan has been found to work admirably. A line frequently taken by the Wellingore foxes, and much in favour with the field, is along under the Cliff to Leadenham and then across to Broughton or Stubton (the latter in the Duke's country). Of very grand character is this Saturday country—the only drawback to it being its limited size. Foxes, consequently, are easily driven out of it, generally to mount the less favoured Heath above. The vale is intersected by the well-known Brant—a stream which, though jumpable in a few places, has usually to be forded. Men have learned to recognise the fact fully, and now seldom ride at it. The fords, too, have been put in order; and getting through the water is no longer the difficult task of days gone by.

The only addenda that occur to us are that the Blankney owed what was perhaps their best run of last season to Tunman's Wood. Hounds had much of it to themselves, and killed their fox in the open in an hour and twenty-six minutes—a thirteen-mile point. And, on the subject of the Burton, we ought to have mentioned, in speaking of Hackthorn Gorse and Carlton, that these beautiful coverts were as the apple of his eye to Lord Henry Bentinck—who was

their winners at the show were all the progeny of famous workers. With them, a hound faulty in the chase is not good enough to keep, still less to breed from—a summary system upon which a younger kennel can seldom afford to act rigidly.

Their country is essentially one for bringing hounds out to advantage; and, while offering them every opportunity and encouragement, will quickly make patent any radical failing. There are large tracts of woodland for cubhunting, schooling, and practising—wild straight foxes and an open country elsewhere—the scent seldom strong enough to carry hounds out of reach—and few difficulties to part them from the huntsman and his attendant lictors. There was a time, the natives say, when *all* the Fitzwilliam country was grass—and wild wet grass on which scent hovered naturally. Now the bulk of its broad acres are condemned to grow wheat that does not pay for sowing—and, easy though it is to root up pasturage, farmers cannot afford the lengthy process of restoring it. And so is it, in more or less degree, all over England. Farmers cannot compete in the corn market against importation; their crops scarcely cover the needed outlay; and thousands of arable farms are consequently going begging. But if tenants have seldom either capital or inclination to lay down herbage in place of the unremunerative ploughland, landlords must do it soon—or be content to see their farms unoccupied. Then will grazing resume its sway—we shall ride over grass everywhere—and *Ware wheat* will be a cry unknown! That such a consummation would be desirable in the Fitzwilliam

country its most ardent admirers would find it difficult to deny. They don't trouble themselves much about *ware wheat* there—or they would never go a-hunting at all—but they would be glad, no doubt, to ride on a sounder surface. The fences, in much of the best of the country, fully bear out the theory that they were grown to separate cattle, rather than to mark the boundary between one field of cereal and another; for they are of blackthorn of high rank growth, often quite impervious and impracticable. The only way to combat them, then, is to "go round." There is usually a comfortable hole in one corner, which the old hands know as readily as a hare does a smeuse. This kind of fence is especially the rule all over the south and south-west of the Fitzwilliam country—a district into which you must take a horse as strong and well-bred as you can afford yourself. Before purchasing, just give him five minutes at his best pace through a deep fallow *with the reins laid on his neck*, and you will know pretty well if he is suited to carry you from Barnwell Wold.

It is much to be wondered at that more hunting-men do not run down—if only for an occasional day—to these hounds. The kennels are at Milton Park, only three miles from Peterborough; and Peterborough, where the best of accommodation may be had, is only about one hour and three quarters from King's Cross. Indeed, for a man whose occupation only allows him two or three days of liberty in the week (and who aspires to something a little wilder than one of Her Majesty's bucks) a much better position at which to station a few horses could not

be chosen. Once, or sometimes twice, a week he might even leave London at nine o'clock, and be in time for the meet of this, one of the greatest packs in England. Or, again, with the railway at the door of his hotel, he may at any time throw in his luck for the day with the Cottesmore, or even run down for an occasional gallop with the Quorn or the Belvoir.

Huntingdon, twenty minutes nearer London on the same line, is another place from which to hunt with the Fitzwilliam, and from here the other days of the week may be filled in with the Cambridgeshire and the Oakley. But Peterborough, as being the point from which hounds start in the morning to return in the evening, may be taken as the special base of operation with a view to the pack in question.

It is rather a severe country for horses — the distances being long, the ground deep, and the woods very trying. It sometimes happens that hounds have as much as thirty miles to journey back to kennels; and, though you may occasionally find your way home by train, your lot may at any time be the same as theirs. So, start with sound horses and strong ones; and be prepared to fill up a gap in the stable should a casualty demand it.

The meets of the Fitzwilliam are regulated as follows—on a system that would appear not only to have been adopted by the present Master, the Marquis of Huntly, but to have been in vogue for many years past. Wednesday and Saturday, being market days at Peterborough, are chosen for the more distant meets in the south of the country—while Monday and Thursday are reserved for the north,

which is all within easy ride of Peterborough. Friday is very frequently a bye-day; and is generally at no great distance from kennels.

Monday is more essentially a Peterborough day; and no effort is spared to render it as good as possible. It will be observed that the river Nene, after running all down the south-west boundary of the country, works across from Oundle to Peterborough. In so doing, it divides the Monday from the Thursday district—the meets of the former being all to the south of the river, those of the latter to the north and north-west.

Some of the chief fixtures for Monday are Alwalton, Chesterton, Ashton Wold, Elton Hall, Washingley, Shark's Lodge, and sometimes as far south as Holme Station. As regards coverts, the nearest to Peterborough are those of Orton and Thompson's Thorns, Jones's Covert, Chesterton, and Alwalton Hills. Haddon Nursery is a very thick newly-planted covert, part of which at one time lay near the North Road, and was much exposed to disturbance. This objection was got over by grubbing up a certain portion, and planting three or four acres more remote from the road—with the best result. Lord Carysford's Coverts, Elton-New-Close, Stock Hill, and Elton Firs lie next —with Lord Huntly's beautiful new gorse at Water Newton, which has already proved very attractive to foxes. There is some fine grass country to the east of Elton, when foxes can be persuaded to take it: and all the Monday district, though much of it is plough, is pleasant riding ground.

Turning to the Thursdays, we find ourselves on

the other side of the Nene, either in what is known as the Soke (as the land just beyond the river is termed), in the Forest, or in the vicinity of Stamford. Some thirty years ago an unbroken line of woodland existed from Milton right across to Deene (the residence of the Cardigan family) and Bulwick, and formed a continuation of the Rockingham Forest. Much of this woodland has been cleared away; but large woods still exist to the west of the Nene; and here the chief part of the cub-hunting, and hound education generally, is carried on. The two greatest strongholds in the Soke—among others too numerous to enumerate—are the Bedford Purlieus (as its name would imply, the property of the Duke of Bedford) and Castor Hanglands. This large covert belongs to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who for years have let it to the Fitzwilliam family—sufficient guarantee that all desiderata for a schooling ground for hounds are duly forthcoming. In drawing these woods—as indeed may be said of hunting the whole country—the rule is observed of working homewards from the most distant coverts. Near Stamford the country becomes lighter and more open. Lord Exeter has considerable coverts; but foxes apparently find their welcome at Burghley a colder one than they were accustomed to under a previous generation. Lord Kesteven's little coverts are better favoured, Lawn Wood and Hilly Wood, and, before the Great Northern Railway pushed across here, there were other coverts down towards Burrough Fen. Now, however, under the multiplied dangers of the railways this part is not regularly hunted. Walcot Hall

and Stamford Racecourse are two of their most northerly meets; while, moving on to the woods, we have Thornhaugh, Wansford, Nassington, and Cotterstock Hall (the hunting residence of the Marquis of Huntly). If the supply of foxes appears to admit of it, Friday generally supplies a second day in the woods.

To the widest meets of Wednesday and Saturday hounds have to be carried by rail—no slight yearly addition to the expenditure of the master. With a railway, however, running southward on either side of the country—to Higham Ferrars and Huntingdon, the inconvenience of the journey is minimised as much as possible; and, under the system of always drawing in the direction of the kennels, hounds always return on foot.

Wednesday is in what is decidedly the best of the Fitzwilliam territory—their Thrapston country, as applied to include their south-west border, touching upon the Pytchley and the Oakley. As neither the last-named pack nor the Cambridgeshire are out on a Wednesday, large contingents gladly lend their strength to the Fitzwilliam. Accordingly the train brings numbers from Cambridge, and even Newmarket, when hounds are advertised for Lilford, Clapton, Thrapston Bridge, Bythorne Tollbar, or Catworth Guide Post. From Lord Lilford's park, they invariably get a strong good fox and a run, either over the grass along the riverside, or far over the wild open country by Barnwell and Weston—sometimes even down to Kimbolton. For the other meets mentioned above there are Barnwell Wold, a

The great feature of all the southern portion of the Fitzwilliam country is the strength and distance apart of its coverts. Take, for instance, Aversley Wood, Barnwell Wold, and Ashton Wold. Foxes are almost always on the spot; and, once disturbed, they must travel long distances to reach a second refuge. With the Fitzwilliam you will always see sport, and see foxes well hunted—AND KILLED.

THE QUORN.*

HONOURED and renowned in history, and with its prestige never higher than at the present time, the Quorn takes first rank among subscription packs. It derives most of its support from Melton Mowbray, which is, *par excellence*, the fashionable hunting centre of England; and apart from its time-honoured and intimate association with that place, and beyond the fact that its maintenance and well-being has ever been the foremost care of Meltonians, it has such advantages of position and country as few other Hunts can claim.

To hunt with the Quorn, "there are three courses open to you." If Melton seems suited to you, *by all means go there.* 'Tis a hunting man's paradise. BUT, we would add, before labelling yourself and your belongings for Melton, take stock of yourself, your proclivities, your capabilities, and above all, the sphere which you have hitherto chosen—or which has chosen you. Melton is not intolerant of the outer world; neither is it rigorous towards its own. Installed and accepted there, no stern censorship will

* *Vide* "Stanford's Railway and Hunting Map," sheet 9.

note your tastes or pounce upon your shortcomings; your horsemanship or your nerve will not be harshly judged, nor even your adaptation of ethics be roughly criticised. But (*verbum sap.*) do not go to Melton to be a fish out of water—even to find yourself not the only one gasping on the bank.

As a quarter the Metropolis of Hunting (as it has long been justly termed) is unrivalled; but though, if at Melton, you would naturally become a member of the Quorn Hunt (and probably give the price of a horse towards its funds), yet your sport would by no means be restricted to that pack. The Quorn country is but limited. The best of it—viz., the Melton side, and generally termed the *grass country*, in contra-distinction to the Forest—is only sufficient for two advertised days a week (Mondays and Fridays), to which the master usually adds a Thursday byeday. Tuesdays and Saturdays are held on the west of the country (totally different ground, and but little worthy of a place in the Shires)—Tuesday in Charnwood Forest and its neighbourhood, and Saturday in a well-tilled wilderness north of Loughborough. These two days are better reached from the latter town, or from Leicester: the Melton men preferring a more favourable scene, nearer home, with the Cottesmore and Belvoir, even to hunting with their own pack.

It is by no means one of the least advantages of Melton Mowbray that hounds are close at hand every day in the week. With the variety offered by three, or even four, packs, it seldom happens that the ride to covert is more than ten miles—and the average

may be taken as nearer six. Better still, hounds almost always leave off equally near at home—and so, from every point of view, hunting may be done as comfortably from Melton as from any place in the world. Standing, as it does, a central point in a sea of grass, in a country where foxhunting is all in all, and where squires, farmers, and even keepers, have been reared to worship the little red animal, the best meets of each pack are those in the neighbourhood of Melton. The Quorn, Cottesmore, and Belvoir countries all run up to a common apex in the town of Melton Mowbray; and arrange their meets so that each day one or other of them shall be in its neighbourhood. To breakfast each morning at 9.30 (with still a marginal half hour for the sluggard), and yet be in good time at the covert-side, is not given to many hunting quarters—and might well encourage the late hours which, whether devoted to society or to tobacco, seldom fail in the end to make their mark on the hardest and the boldest. But men who belong to the latter class know this too well. They know, too, that they have come to Leicestershire to hunt and to ride; and that, if their power and zest to do this once fails, the land will be but a desert to them —and so they go to bed early, leaving those to sit up to whom the chase offers nothing more sterling than another school for scandal, another field for small talk. The canter to covert, too! That "it is better fun riding to covert in Leicestershire than hunting elsewhere" is as solemnly true as ever, albeit the gallant author has been beguiled into another county. Mile upon mile of swinging turf—if only you know

your way, and how to avoid the muddy, fresh granited roads. Geography is not—may we be pardoned for saying?—the strong point of the Meltonian. Each has his own way to covert; but it by no means always happens that he has one to take him home. It does not chime in with his creed to know the country—and the creed is not altogether an unsound one. When hounds are running, *he* will ride best to them who can attend solely to what they are doing, and blind himself to the direction the fox may be taking. Thus will novelty never be wanting, and enjoyment reaped where others are grumbling because they have ridden this line before.

Melton, then, commands the Quorn on Mondays and Fridays, and on Thursday there is either a byeday with that pack, or the Cottesmore are in reach, or else Mr. Tailby is in the north of his country. On Tuesdays the Cottesmore, and on Wednesdays the Belvoir, are always at hand; while on alternate Saturdays these packs take it in turn to be close to Melton. Thus, it will be seen, the six days are pretty well occupied; and, unless you wish to have Melton all to yourself for a day, you must have horses enough to carry you on all six. Half a dozen thoroughly seasoned, and conditioned, hunters will see you through the winter, *with luck;* especially if a fortnight's frost comes at the time you could best do with it. But with this number, and with everything in your favour, you will often have to come home early in the day and miss many an afternoon gallop. Two horses a day (besides the hack who, from some extraordinary combination of virtues, is able to come out nearly

every day) are almost indispensable to the thorough enjoyment of hunting in Leicestershire. In the crowd and confusion of the morning you are not so likely to see sport; but it is all one horse's work to keep moving on with the ruck. In the afternoon there is generally a run—and for this you want a fresh horse. The crowd have gone home; hounds have a fair chance, and the master has kept his best covert for the evening draw. The sun has disappeared; the wind, maybe, has fallen; the glass is rising, and scent is a moral certainty. Your fox is only too ready to go; hounds get away at his brush; all the choicest spirits are there, *full of ride;* and the country is the Twyford Vale. To be on a tired horse is misery—and perhaps grief to you both. You *ought* not to ride bad ones at all (at least within hail of Melton); but we all get them occasionally, and have to make the best of them—wrapping the secret of their vileness in our own breasts. If obliged to bring such an one to the covert side, ride him in the morning. If necessary, trot the brute about the roads, keeping your own counsel, and letting the world think, if it chooses, that you are not so keen and hard as you used to be. The world—at all events the morning world—will not take half as much note of you as you fancy. But, as you value your pleasure (and your reputation), don't ride the said brute in the afternoon. Send him home with a thanksgiving; and get on your trusty one with a chuckle. He is bold, and swift, and stout. Your heart bounds; your blood warms; you feel you are as good as your neighbours; you mutter something in his ear that you would not

for a thousand should be overheard—and, if hounds run, you will ride none the worse for that morning's abstinence.

The first of the three courses by which you may hunt with the Quorn being to take a six-days a-week stud to Melton; the second is to establish yourself at Leicester or Loughborough, the third is to take a hunting box in the country. We have already made some allusion to the first-named plan; and further, in treating of the grass side of the Quorn, shall consider that part of the country in connection with Melton. On the merits of the other plans we shall have something to say as we continue.

As regards its position from London, Melton Mowbray is a little more than three hours' journey from St. Pancras, by way of Leicester. Leaving London at 3.30 p.m., you are landed anywhere in Melton before 7. But it is only attainable on the morning of hunting by taking the mail train at 5.15 a.m.—with all the miseries consequent on such an hour in December or January.

Monday and Friday being, as we have said, the two days on which the Quorn are out on their Melton, or *grass*, side, we will take them first in order. A glance at the map (sheet 9 of Stanford's series) will show the river Wreake running from Melton to Syston, where it joins the river Soar on its way from Leicester. North of the Wreake, then, is the Monday country of the Quorn, while south and south-east of the two rivers is the Friday country. The Midland Railway has cunningly chosen the valleys of these rivers for its course; and close parallel to them runs the

Leicester and Melton turnpike road—whereof the story has been told for a century that two Meltonians of coaching fame, wagering to name the best fifteen miles of coach road against each other, handed their respective judgments on paper to a referee; the papers being opened, the one had written "from Leicester to Melton," the other "from Melton to Leicester."

Once a year the Quorn meet at Melton Mowbray itself—usually at Egerton Lodge, the hunting-box of the Father of the Hunt, Lord Wilton. This, however, is generally a sequence to the races of Croxton Park or the Steeplechases of Burrough Hill, and an immediate prelude to the break up of the season. The nearest covert to Melton is Welby Fishponds, planted by Lord Wilton for the Hunt—an excellent little covert of gorse and osiers, and in ordinary times fruitful of fine runs. For it is too small for foxes to dwell; and beyond a couple of ploughed fields immediately adjoining, there is a wide area of strong scenting grass in every direction. *In ordinary times*, we said advisedly—for look at those strings of red dotted lines festooning the map on every side of Melton! What are these but *railways in progress?* Railways *in being* are hateful and sport-spoiling enough; but railways in progress are to a hunting country as the Colorado beetle to the potato. To the iron rails and the puffing engines foxes get used. To the indignity of galloping a mile round to a bridge (where we were wont to strike a free bee line as we chose) we can become blunted. But not only are railways in course of construction bristling all day

with gangs of shouting workmen; but the honest navvy cares not to work more than three or four days in the week, preferring to take his pleasure in snaring in solitude, in rabbit digging with a chum after his own heart, or in openly beating the fox-coverts in force. If the hounds are out they have mustered, a noisy hundred, at the covertside, an hour or so before the pack is thrown in. Yes, lamentable and disfiguring as those red lines will still look on the face of this fair country, they will be welcome when drawn continuous and finished, in comparison with the state of progress and devastation conveyed by their present dotted length.

Asfordby is another meet for Welby Fishponds and the useful little copse of Cant's Thorns adjoining. Hounds are also sometimes brought to Ab Kettleby for the same; but more often for the coverts neutral with the Belvoir, to which we shall come immediately. Ragdale is for Shoby Scholes and Lord Aylesford's—two splendid coverts almost touching each other. The former is a thickly wooded dell, overlooking which the field have to stand on the grass hills on either side the wide hollow. Their fox, likely enough, breaks down the valley; then, with a rare country, and a quick scenting one, all round, it is a ride to be with hounds. Over the brow is Lord Aylesford's—a grand gorse and broom covert of twenty or thirty acres, where more foxes were found last season than anywhere in the Monday country. A free loan it is, too—and a loan right well appreciated.

Further to the left along the roadside is Ratcliff-on-the-Wreake, the widest Monday meet in this direction.

Cossington Gorse from here (more of thorn than gorse in its composition, by the way) is a covert of happy memory and glorious connection. It stands by the side of the old Roman Fosse Road, which (well cared for to Six Hills, afterwards a deep wild track such as would do credit to the New Forest) runs from Leicester to Newark, as any map will plainly tell. A Cossington fox must either break westwards into a country whose style is more befitting a Saturday draw; or he puts a very different colouring on the proceedings by crossing the road and embarking on ground almost sacred in its associations—the Hoby and Thrussington lordships, to wit. That is the country to test the best of men, and the best of horses, even of Melton; for the fields are forty acres apiece, and the fences are to be jumped—but *nothing more.* Hounds, on fair terms with their fox, can fly over them on anything like a scenting day; and we maintain it is a pleasanter country to cross quick than to crane over—for the fences will not bear too much looking at. From Cossington Gorse past Thrussington and Hoby villages to Shoby Scholes is a twenty-five minutes' enjoyment not to be surpassed even in the Shires—provided always that you are riding a horse fit for the journey. A good horse is essential to comfort anywhere—but a *superlatively good horse* is needed for Leicestershire, not only to accomplish the country, but to combat the crowd. He should be as nearly thoroughbred as you can get him, or he will not live the pace or *jump when he is half beat.* He must be bold, and yet be tractable. Believe not what is often broadly stated, that riding over Leicestershire is no more difficult for horse or

man than a practice gallop over a training course, and that the fences may be taken as they come, like hurdles. *Many* men have we seen come down imbued with this idea (perhaps we once held it ourselves), and one and all were quickly in grief in consequence—with the result that they either benefited by the experience to do themselves and their horses justice, or retired hurt and mortified. No, Leicestershire is the last county over which to ride haphazard; and a Leicestershire horse should possess no common combination of qualities. He must be able to gallop, and he must be ready to jump; but he must be handy to turn, and easy to stop—willing to creep a bottom, to drop his hind legs at a double, to brush a bullfinch, or to fly an oxer. It may be argued that a four-year-old has often been known to carry a man successfully to hounds over the grass. True, but the credit belongs rather to the man than the horse. The colt has blood and courage; the man has coolness and cleverness sufficient to help him through his difficulties; and the line has probably been all plain sailing. Depend upon it, four-year-olds (and a four-year-old of high class is far better in the Shires than an older horse of inferior stamp) will not carry the best men to the front every day and all day; and to live with hounds regularly, you must ride horses of superior stamp, of thorough training, and, if possible, over your weight.

Six Hills is a kind of Croydon Junction to the best coverts of the Monday country; and, consequently, seldom remains unadvertised two weeks in succession. It is little more than half a dozen miles from Melton,

and constitutes almost a central spot for the whole of the Quorn country. With hounds at Six Hills it is useless for the most practised sinner to attempt the vice of speculating on the draw. Thrussington Wolds is a couple of hundred yards away, Thrussington Gorse half a mile, Walton Thorns the same, Mr. Cradock's Spinney still less, Shoby Scholes and Lord Aylesford's a mile and a half, and Cossington Gorse two miles—and any of them may be chosen as first draw. Of these coverts Thrussington Wolds is a snug little wood of about thirty acres; the Gorse (or New Covert) is sound, and thick, and well favoured, and both overlook the fine bullock-pastures that stretch down to the Wreake—offering every temptation to a good fox to try his luck across the open. Walton Thorns and Mr. Cradock's spinney are the property of the same good fox preserver; and, in spite of neighbouring difficulties the Thorns are seldom untenanted, no matter how often appealed to. Great runs are on record, and great runs are recent, from Walton Thorns. Did they not kill THE *bobtail* from there—fifty-three minutes without a check, the death at Sysonby (by Melton) and nearly every field grass? Twelve years ago; but three times twelve will not wipe it from the memories of the few who rode that November gallop. And it was last November again that the Quorn bitches, never lifted or touched, ran into an old fox "as big as a wolf," in Bunny Park—fifty-five minutes from the Thorns, and *very few* fields grass. Just beyond Walton Thorns is Burton Park. It is a matter of regret that Lord Archibald Seymour no longer hunts.

For years he kept twenty horses at Melton. But he has many nice little coverts at Burton—and of course he is pleased to think they are full of foxes for his old friends, and, in all the generous feeling evolved by foxhunting and its memories, delights in seeing hounds drawing his plantations as often as they can come. As a stuttering friend of mine responded to one who would fain have helped him through his half completed sentence—"N . . . nothing of the sort, sir! *Damme, sir, nothing of the sort!!*" He has forgotten the past.

Plunging northwards up the unkempt Fosse Road from Six Hills (which after Christmas, by the way, no one thinks of doing if they can possibly go round), a three-mile journey brings us to a point opposite Willoughby Village, and about midway between the covert of that name and Curate's Gorse. Willoughby Village is a frequent, and—so long as the Widmerpool country beyond was well cared for—was a favourite meet. The covert (which is blackthorn and gorse) is rather too close to the village, but the inhabitants are vastly fond of fox-hunting—so they leave it undisturbed and many a pretty gallop accrues. If the line should be towards Bunny or Widmerpool, you soon find yourself on a light plough district; but immediately round Willoughby, on every side but one, are small grass enclosures, with neat nice fences worthy of a good horse. Once well away from here, the country will either be still made up of these pleasant green fields (as is the case round Wimeswould), or degenerate into plough, with fences of no size, but trappy and

blind. Your fox must determine which variety you shall encounter; for both phases are to be found in any direction. A common, and, it may be, a good line is to Ellar's Gorse—a covert that has, however, scarcely paid its rent of late years—and thence over the Fosse to the Curate. The last named famous gorse, with its companion Parson's Thorns, are just over, and on, the summit of the high ground above the Belvoir Vale—the village of Hickling being a mile or so beneath the Parson's. Indeed, the chief charm of these time-honoured coverts is the chance of dropping into the Vale (in its very best part) and attaining a sharp sweet burst to Old Dalby Wood, to Sherbrooke's Covert (of the Duke's), or to the neutral covert of Holwell Mouth. A pleasanter line cannot be ridden than to either of these three points—save when the Smite is encountered in an intractable form. As we move on to Widmerpool all again depends on the direction taken by foxes—when there are any. It may be accepted as a general statement (not without its exceptions) that all the country to the west of the Fosse Road is very inferior to that on the east, the Melton side. At and near Widmerpool are extensive coverts (as Leicestershire coverts go)—Roehoe Wood and Kinoulton Gorse being instances. Beyond these are Owthorpe Borders, Wynstay Gorse, and many plantations, all which are just above the Vale —and if a fox will run thither 'tis all you want. But should he take you down towards Costock, Bunny, Plumptre, &c., your fate will be a less stirring one, and your career less exciting.

Turning now to the part that is neutral with the

Belvoir, we have the meets of Wartnaby (sometimes at the Stonepits, or, better in every sense, at the Hall) and Ab Kettleby, each about four miles from Melton. After drawing the Long Plantation of Wartnaby, hounds are taken, generally by their fox, along the hill side to Holwell Mouth. Holwell Mouth is the warmest of basin copses, and foxes delight in it. From here a fox will more often cross the brow to Clawson Thorns, half a mile into the Duke's country; and from there he will probably come back again, repeating the operation *ad lib.* But frequently he slips away into the tempting Vale, which lies mapped out like a green chessboard below; and in this case he invariably leaves nine-tenths of his scarlet-coated followers behind. The Quorn have no covert in their slip of the Belvoir Vale; so a Holwell Mouth fox taking the lower ground will either lead them to Sherbrooke's Covert of the Duke's, or mount the Hill again to the Curate, or round to, and through, Old Dalby Wood. The latter is a thin, but well-placed brake; but foxes have not favoured it, or else have been but little favoured, of late years; for though they will run through it they decline to reside there. After Holwell Mouth the next neutral covert is Saxelby Spinney, and then Grimston Gorse—the last named a fine covert, but with a railway cutting in course of formation through it. All round Grimston and Saxelby is a grand stiff grass country, as fine as can be ridden over, and generally carrying a rich scent.

Having now completed our brief sketch of the geography of the Monday country, we may carry our

pen across the Wreake for a few topographical jottings anent the Quorn Fridays. Kirby Gate (or rather, the site of the old tollbar) is the first, and nearest, meet of the season. Custom says they ought to come there for the opening day; and so, as is right, they do. Later on, they save three miles by making Great Dalby the rendezvous before proceeding to draw Gartree Hill. This famous thorn covert of Mr. Hartopp's (adjoining the Punchbowl and others which he provides, all equally stocked, for the Cottesmore) is situated quite in an extreme corner of the Quorn territory. The Burton Flat stretches out at its feet, with Stapleford Park, the Whissendine, and many miles of grass beyond; just to the right is the hill of Little Dalby, with the Punchbowl, Burrough Hill, and the cream of the Cottesmore behind these. At the back of Gartree Hill again are the great ox-fenced pastures of Great Dalby. Little wonder, then, that, with every advantage of preservation and situation, such great and frequent runs should have been booked to this covert, and the adjacent one of Sir Francis Burdett's —another thick thorn fastness below Dalby Hill. After a morning here, hounds may be taken on to draw Adams' Gorse, a little covert near Thorpe Satchville, close to the Melton Steeplechase Course, and with the best country in the hunt within hail. Or, without stopping here, they will be thrown into one of the great trio of coverts—Thorpe Trussels, Ashby Pastures, and Cream Gorse. When these are required for morning work, the meets will probably be Thorpe Satchville Hall, Ashby Folville, and

Gaddesby Hall, respectively. A narrow chain of plough (some two or three fields broad) embraces all three coverts; but once clear, either to the north or south, you will ride, in the best of company, over a grass country that has no superior. Thorpe Trussels is composed of some six or eight acres of dense thorn growth, Cream Gorse is a trifle bigger, with Ashby Pastures in between, a tangled wood of about fifty acres—each being about a mile from the other. To run down by Ashby and Twyford, perhaps to Baggrave, John o' Gaunt, or the Cottesmore Woods, with a good scent and a start, is only so much short of Elysium as your disposition is phlegmatic and yourself out of place.

Another meet, with an ulterior view to Cream Gorse, &c., is Brooksby Hall. It is also very frequently fixed upon for the Thursday byedays; and it has many little spinneys in its neighbourhood, to which the smaller field of such days are often taken for a find and a gallop. There are two or three similar spinnies belonging to Rearsby, besides the well sheltered little covert of Bleakmore by the side of the Wreake. Beyond Gaddesby there is Mr. Cheney's new little covert; then Queniboro' Spinney, a well frequented plantation by the roadside; and beyond it we find ourselves at the great good covert of Barkby Holt, and the newly grown gorse attached—the village of Queniboro' and Barkby Hall being the places of meeting. When Barkby Hall is advertised, the spinnies of Barkby Thorpe, and perhaps those of Humberston, may be drawn before proceeding to the Holt; and, in the early part of the

season especially, they are more than likely to hold foxes. Barkby Holt has for fifty years or more been one of the tightest strongholds of the Friday country. It is, like Ashby Pasture, a wood of perhaps fifty acres, with great density of undergrowth, and, when looked after as it has been during Mr. Brooks' time, is a nursery and never failing reservoir of foxes. It stands in a district peculiarly known as the Barkby-and-Scraptoft-country; and is perhaps more generally popular among the Quornites than any ground in the Hunt. The greater proportion of farms in the neighbourhood are grass in its purest and simplest form; and the fences, not set very far from each other, are all not only jumpable, but "cry out to be jumped"—so fair and clean and negotiable are they. From Barkby Holt to Scraptoft Gorse is a twenty minutes that will teach a four-year-old, or make an octogenarian think himself as young as ever. Next to Barkby is Baggrave—whose energetic owner is never content with *one* fox in six acres. By some magic he tempts them, till we have seen five in succession break *in February*, from the Prince of Wales' Covert. Hounds away in a moment with the last, their original choice—the brook at the bottom of the valley, only to be jumped here and there — five hundred horsemen and the devil to pay—for they hate that brook and three are in already! 'Tis as quick a scenting country as any in the Hunt, and in five minutes you are in the Twyford country. A long pair of spurs, the best horse in your stable (perhaps a luncheon at the Hall), and it will come easy to you. Such is Baggrave. The meet at Lowesby Hall, the

find John o'Gaunt, used to be much the same thing—only the disagreeable element was in the ascendant, for the Marfield Brook couldn't be jumped. Happily they have changed that, bridged the chasm, and left the road open for the line that has made John o'Gaunt immortal—if only the new railway does not spoil all. We are getting into a country now that requires control over pen and pencil. The quill jumps as to the spur, and comment and description fling against the bit—remembering that often of late they have been curbed to write the clumsiness of plough as "good sporting country," and to title slow scenting fallows as "honest hunting ground." *Honest* forsooth! Is not every foot of soil turned by the ploughshare *suppressio veri* in its wickedest form? In front of John o' Gaunt are thousands of acres which never grew a quartern loaf or brought grist to any mill save the grazier's and the butcher's. Hounds can run, and horses must gallop, if a fox will cross the Twyford Brook to Burrough Hill, or thread the brookside to Owston Wood. There is other country as good in the Shires—for you can't go beyond perfection; but we have yet to ride over, or learn of, *better*. No, not even from the Coplow of Billesdon, or from Lord Moreton's covert at Cold Newton on the way thither, superlative as is the ride across the nullah-broken plains to Tilton Wood, or over the smoother acres to Norton Gorse and Kibworth. Billesdon Coplow is, perhaps, the best memorialised landmark in the whole Quorn country. It has had its deserts in song and say during each era of mastership for generations past, and is still as prominent a

feature in the sport—and the scenery—of the Hunt as ever. Botany Bay, as the covert at its base is called, gives forth foxes and runs as freely as in years gone by. A mile or so away is Scraptoft, with its hall of hospitality, and its sterling gorse—another point from which the Billesdon country is frequently pierced. But whichever line foxes take from the Coplow or from Scraptoft Gorse, they have strong good grass over which to lead a Friday field. And this Quorn Friday field is of numbers such as would horrify—or even crush—any other hunt. Of course every man who wears a Q. H. button on his coat, or lives on Quorn soil, is there. So is everyone from the Cottesmore who is within reach, and who has a horse to bring out. Mr. Tailby's followers all join in; and even some of the Belvoir for the nearer meets. It is the great day for Leicester; and Rugby sends a contingent by train. Of such a multitude of course only a small minority ever catch a glimpse of hounds at work. But all do not care about that. The country is so wide, there are so many places where they can jump, and so many gates that they can go through, that it is easy enough for all to get about — and so they do, enjoying themselves each in his own way. But a Quorn Friday for the man who loves hounds is pleasanter at four o'clock than at twelve.

Adding that Mr. Warner has given the Hunt a very promising young covert near Willoughby (in the Monday country); that Beeby, Keyham, and Quenby Hall are frequent Friday meets (Beeby for Barkby Holt or Scraptoft Gorse, Keyham for Foxholes, and

Quenby for the Coplow)—and we have done with the grass country of the Quorn.

Of the three alternative plans for hunting with the Quorn, we have hitherto considered only that of a stud at Melton, and written only of that part of the Quorn country of which Melton is the principal and legitimate base. But from Leicester or Loughborough you may be just as staunch a Quornite, and stick even more closely to your colours—for you will not have the same temptation or opportunity of leaving them, to go elsewhere. Leicester will give you a Thursday with Mr. Tailby (if you prefer it to a bye-day with the pack in question), and an occasional day with the Atherstone. From Loughborough you may go out (if you think it good enough to abandon the grass on Monday or Friday) with Lord Ferrers, in the slip of country that has been lent him by the Quorn. But from both towns you will in all probability attend all the four, or five, Quorn meets; and as few people, nowadays, go to either place with horses for six days a week, you are most likely to limit yourself altogether to the home pack. A quarter of a century ago the Bell at Leicester was a great resort of hunting-men. Lord Gardner, for instance, made it his head quarters for years, and so did many other leading Leicestershire men. But Leicester in those days was a small market town, knew nothing of cotton hose, and had no chimneys higher than that of the hotel. Now it is like a great ever-growing octopus—stretching its brick and mortar limbs in every direction and daily gathering more of the sacred soil into its unhallowed grasp, while its black breath is

wafted over half the country. But you may still get your hunting from it, and the accommodation is no less complete than ever. And yet, to settle down in the midst of a manufacturing town, with a view to foxhunting, has something incongruous about it. It doesn't seem natural that the first mile or two of your journey to covert should be past factories, workshops and trams; still less that the last stage of your return home should be enlivened by narrow escapes from hansom cabs, while, perhaps, your muddy pink and broken hat provide jest and jibe for unsympathising "factory hands." Loughborough is less than three miles from the kennels; so as regards distances and journeys you are no worse off than the huntsman (besides having the pull over him of being able to choose your own pace). Loughborough is a quiet little town—though yearning to swell itself out after the manner of its big brother. Both are on the main line of the Midland Railway—Leicester about two hours and a quarter, Loughborough some three hours, from St. Pancras.

The third alternative—viz., to take a hunting box, away from the towns—recommends itself to many people, especially such as, while wishing to spend their season in a good country, are unwilling to bind themselves down to hunting every day in the week. A man must live somewhere; so must his wife—and children. And setting aside the mere accident of his taste, surely the green lanes of Leicestershire are to be preferred, for these others, even to the "salubrisome" vicinity of Great Coram Street—still more to the unhealthy miasma of upturned arable. He puts

it to himself (with the most satisfactory results) whether his other half will not find an unlimited source of enjoyment in the Shires. She does not ride much, it is true; but then she can drive to the meets, and see as much society there in a morning as she could elsewhere in a week. The advantage is so evident, that he does not hesitate to appeal to his *cara sposa* to endorse his conclusion, and is rather startled to find that her delight somewhat hangs fire. So he probably remembers that this is the very moment he ought to have been out of doors with a cigar; and a week afterwards has learned from his agents that they cannot possibly find him a house elsewhere, and that it would be madness to lose such an opportunity as the "bijou residence within a few miles of the Quorn kennels," &c. So of necessity he moves down to Leicestershire for better—or for worse, if, a stranger to the country, he has been beguiled by his agents into the depths of Charnwood Forest, as being "in the heart of the Quorn country." If he has avoided the latter fate, he is now on the spot, to hunt according to his means—or beyond them. The measure of horses he allows himself, eat no more here than in an inferior country, while they give him infinitely more fun. As for the days he stops at home, he is to be pitied if he cannot find occupation in the resources at his command. At Melton, on the other hand (at all events as an unprotected bachelor), a day's absence from the hunting field—the weather being open—will not only be prolonged agony in itself, but an evening among more fortunate comrades cannot but oppress and mortify the spirit—kindly

though they may strive to ignore the happy burst, with which they are glowing still.

Tuesday and Saturday are essentially and respectively the days for Leicester and Loughborough *only*. Leicester often sends out a strong representative body—chiefly citizens, for Leicester has comparatively few visitors now; and these citizens are of various degree, the variety being more broadly marked as the meet is nearer the burgh. The *haute noblesse* of the city is well mounted, fairly caparisoned, and anxious to be "High Leicestershire" in all its prowess and appointment. The middle ten, and squires of lower degree, make up a field that will challenge comparison unabashed with that of the other side of the county—and, doubtless, when meeting near the town, Tom Firr has instituted more than one happy comparison, under his breath. It is at one or two of the best Tuesday fixtures that Leicester is most fully represented. A wedge of country runs southward from Leicester, cutting in between the Atherstone and Mr. Tailby; and with excellent grass on either side. Narborough Cross Roads is the best meet in this outlying strip; and from the osier bed of Narborough Bogs, whenever a fox can escape the joint difficulties of road, river, and railway, a capital gallop is to be had. From Cosby Spinnies, too (the southernmost point of the Quorn country), many a good line has been struck into the neighbouring countries; and the same may be said of the Enderby Spinnies. After drawing these they have no choice but to move on by Braunston towards the Forest. In this direction (west of Leicester and bordering on

the Atherstone) are meets at Kirby Muxloe, Ratby Burrows, &c., from which they draw Martinshaw Wood and a chain of woods northwards—the best result that can ensue being a trip into the Atherstone kingdom. Failing this they probably find themselves amid the ruins, rocks, and rabbit holes of Bradgate Park, or the woods and quarries of Swithland. If Charnwood Forest now exists only in name, its former whereabouts is unmistakeable. Nothing but forest has a right to occupy those wild rugged hills that run from Bradgate nearly to Gracedieu. Clearly they must have been a landslip from far Derbyshire into Leicestershire, for they have no place in a county that the world generally believes to consist of flat grass. Rather we expect to see Charnwood Forest again when we hunt with the wild stag in Somersetshire. And yet Firr's horn sounds not less merrily here than in the open; nor do hounds dash after their game with diminished vigour. Foxes are killed here more certainly than under the baffling presence of a crowd. The same good hounds and the same good horses take their turn as on the grass; for Mr. Coupland hunts the better country and the inferior with impartial hearty earnestness. And yet in advising the stranger, we shall not err much in saying that fifty pounds will carry him nearly as well in the Forest as a hundred and fifty—except that, if hounds slip over the border to the Atherstone, twenty minutes may possibly put that hundred pounds difference them and him. The Forest is a fine scenting ground, and invaluable for educating hounds—at least in such parts as are available for the early

hunting. Bradgate Ruins, Newtown Linford, Ansty and Grooby Pool are three meets all with one intent; then we have Swithland Slate Quarries, Woodhouse Eaves, Ulverscroft, &c.—all in the Forest. Copt Oak is for Bardon Wood and Charley Wood, and thence on into the Outwoods—Lord Ferrers' holding beginning where the Forest ends. Beaumanor is the meet nearest to home, except the kennels themselves, which have Quorn Wood as a standing dish close by.

The Quorn Saturdays range from immediately round Loughborough northwards to the Nottingham end of the country. The scene is laid on ground that, though apart from the Forest is on the other hand blessed with but little of the Leicestershire specialty, turf. Here and there a smattering is to be found, but on the whole this district is very Nottingham-like in character and appearance. It contains many good coverts, is well preserved and vigorously hunted, but as a country to ride over it's uninteresting —dull, in fact, as dry bread on a thirsty morning. Hounds travel well over many parts; but the chief merit of its cold ploughs lies in the necessity of their putting their heads down—thus eradicating any ill effects consequent on a previous day's temptation on the grass. Down the valley of the Soar there are indeed some very pretty meadows, over which, when meeting at Cotes Tollbar (just outside Loughborough) a fox may possibly travel from the spinney between river and railway. If they do not find there, Stanford Park is usually the next order—and here they are sure to find game. On the other side of Loughborough they have Hathern Turn and Dishley Grange,

for Oakley Wood and Piper Wood; Garendon Park, too, with Burleigh Wood close handy. Prestwold Park generally has foxes in it; while the meets of Rempstone and Wymeswould refer to Hoton Spinney and the New Coverts for their first fox. Wysall on the cards means Bunny Park and the wooded ridge adjoining—and a prayer that the wind will not blow you over the Leak Hills. Widmerpool, though we have included it in Monday's meets has frequently been named for Saturday—in which case more than one Meltonian will forsake the Belvoir, on the chance of "the Curate" in the afternoon.

THE COTTESMORE.*

For the truest sport, the straightest foxes, for perfection of country, for long runs and fast runs, commend us to the wild pastures of the Cottesmore. A wide spread region scarcely inhabited; ground that carries a scent in all weathers; woodlands which breed a travelling race; and mile upon mile of untracked grass, where a fox will meet nothing more terrifying than a bullock — no wonder, then, the finest runs of the season are with the Cottesmore; that more hard riders and grand horses are present when Ranksboro' is drawn than are ever mustered elsewhere; or that the Punchbowl and Stapleford are names to make us stir in our chairs, even in this listless early August. Surely, if the hunting field can ever claim comparison with the field of chivalry, if ever the doings of the chase can be reckoned with the daring deeds of tournament or joust, it is when three hundred of the best men of the present day sit down to keep the Cottesmore bitches in sight on a scenting morning. Head and hand, heart and horseflesh, are the first requisites. Some practice, and

* "Stanford's Railway and Hunting Map," sheets 9, 10, 15, 16.

much self-confidence, are almost as necessary. Depend upon it, the leaders have all these; with a keen eye, a quick pulse, and no little enthusiasm (perhaps a shade of ambition) besides. But the present articles are meant to form a matter-of-fact, and doubtless dry, directory; so our sketch of the Cottesmore must be cut in as clear and naked outline as we can.

First of all, it is necessary to tell you that, if you are to look at the country through the medium of Stanford's maps, you must provide yourself with no less than four sheets (Nos. 9, 10, 15, and 16), as the Cottesmore have the misfortune to fall at the junction of the four. Another shilling will give you one of W. H. Smith's Reduced Ordnance Maps of Leicester, or Peterboro', and its environs; and five minutes work will suffice for inking off the boundaries of the Cottesmore as pourtrayed (more, or less, correctly) by Mr. Stanford's draughtsman. The gentleman in question, it will be noticed, after getting safely over the Whissendine, stopped short at the little stream under Leesthorpe, and declined to include even Stapleford Park, Berry Gorse, and Mr. Hartopp's riverside plantations. If we mistake not, the River Eye (lower down being the Wreake) carries the boundary of the Cottesmore to Melton Mowbray, to meet the Belvoir and the Quorn. At any rate in the corner between the Melton and Oakham Road and the River Eye you will go with no other hounds, unless on a marauding expedition.

The Cottesmore country is not exactly easy to describe and classify. Perhaps we may best divide it as follows, viz., into three longitudinal sections, terming

them respectively the Melton country, the Oakham or middle country, and the woods. For two days and the best two days in their week Melton is an admirable base. Oakham is in the very middle of the country and commands every meet; while if some vagary of fancy should prompt you to take stabling at Stamford you are on the spot for the woodlands. Concerning Melton we have already spoken. Oakham is held by its patrons to be *facile princeps* as a centre for sport; for, besides holding good all the Cottesmore meets, it is within reach of a Quorn Friday, an occasional Belvoir Saturday, and a day once a fortnight with Mr. Tailby. But it is, of course, essentially in connection with the Cottesmore that Oakham recommends itself—offering such a fill of wild and varied hunting that a man need go no farther afield, in quest of change. The Cottesmore country, indeed, is the one of all others where a hard riding well mounted lover of foxhunting may best enjoy himself. It is here that foxhunting is to be seen in its wildest truest form; but to see it a man *must* ride hard, and to ride hard (and successfully) he must, as we have said, be more than fairly mounted. As regards Stamford, we doubt if any one ever fixes upon it as a hunting quarter, though it is about as near London as either Melton or Oakham, and commands as much of the Fitzwilliam as it does of the Cottesmore. All three places are situate on the line between Leicester and Peterboro', and can thus be reached either by the Midland or Great Northern, in three to three and a half hours. All three, also, are quiet market towns. Apart from hunting, they were evidently of more importance

in coaching days than now; and all are replete with accommodation for man, and for beasts to any number.

The western half of the Cottesmore territory (including what we shall term the Melton, and most of the Oakham country) is not only the better moiety, but in our opinion reaches a higher standard than any tract of ground we know. There are woods of manageable size providing the stoutest of foxes in fullest abundance, while, on every side alike, hill and plain offer the same staunch scenting grass, and a bold fox cannot choose a bad line. Exception is sometimes taken to the severity of the hills in certain parts, such as the neighbourhood of Tilton, Launde, Lodington, and Tugby. They certainly test a horse; but we have never seen hounds run over them so quickly, but that well bred horses could live with them. And, again, foxes seldom cling long to the higher and rougher ground—preferring rather to go for their lives over the smoother country. Then it is that the grand flying runs of the Cottesmore take place. It seldom happens that there is not scent enough to carry hounds along; and so, once in the open, on fair terms with their fox, they are pretty sure to make a run, of merit more or less. An old and well established pack, they have had great attention paid to them of late years. Quick, determined, and persevering, they can burst a fox or work him to death, as scent and circumstance allow. And theirs is a country in which they have scope to do it.

It is on Tuesdays and Saturdays that they are in

what we have denominated their Melton country, being the westernmost strip, running down from Melton and Stapleford till it joins Mr. Tailby's at Skeffington and Allexton. (Curiously enough, the river Eye marks for a short distance this northern boundary, while the Eye Brook marks the southern, from Allexton to the Welland.)

On Thursdays, too, they are often attainable from Melton in their middle country, from Market Overton southwards.

In treating of the geography of the country, we will take the meets and coverts in order, more in regard to their distance from Melton and Oakham, than in connection with the day of the week to which they belong. For Tuesdays and Saturdays often point to a similar district, while the Saturdays alternate between the extreme south and north of this Melton country—the Cottesmore and the Belvoir taking it in turn to hold their Saturday close to the metropolis.

It has to be noted, too, that Mr. Stanford's topographer painted his boundaries previous to the reclaiming by the Cottesmore of their loan to Mr. Tailby, whose country may now be described as coming no further north than Skeffington, Allexton and Stockerston.

The nearest meets, and almost always chosen for this last-named day, are Wyld's Lodge, Stapleford Bedehouses, and Leesthorpe. Wyld's Lodge has the little covert of Berry Gorse close at hand, with Mr. Hartopp's plantations to follow, and Stapleford Park as the *pièce de resistance;* and Stapleford Bedehouses

may be said to offer the same *ménu* in inverted order. The former meet is between two and three miles from Melton; while Stapleford Bedehouses and Park is about four. In the Park is the Pond Plantation, fertile of good runs, but requiring every sense on the watch for a start. A minute's delay in hitting off the nearest gateway in the ring fence; and you may not see hounds again till you learn that they have had "a screaming forty minutes and a kill." Just outside the Park is Laxton's covert, with a famous stream flowing just below—jumpable in most places, but varying deceptively. By the way, there are two brooks running parallel to each other hereabouts. They cannot both be *the* Whissendine, though they have been made one by confusion, and termed the Whissendine indiscriminately. Belonging to adjacent valleys, they have generally been taken for a single twisting watercourse; and the Whissendine accordingly jumped twice as often. In truth, the stream below Laxton's Covert is *not* the veritable brook of history and song; which, on the contrary, runs through the village of Whissendine, before it, also, joins the Eye. In the splendid line from Laxton's Covert to Ranksboro'—which, in part or whole, forms a frequent happy feature in a season in the Melton country—you will cross both streams, if you are lucky enough, and good enough, to achieve the feat. The Whissendine, indeed, is in few places half as terrible as it is painted. Yet have we often seen its turgid waters dammed (Printer, play us not false with the spelling) by struggling men and horses; and its very reputation makes the ordinary

rider look round for a lead as he approaches its banks.

Leesthorpe (five miles on the Oakham road) for the meet, leaves it open to proceed to Stapleford Park, or to turn towards Little Dalby and the Punchbowl. If the plantations (Wheathills, &c.) round Dalby Hall do not hold, the Punchbowl's snug nest is sure to be full of foxes. Then away over Burrough Hill to Twyford, Somerby, Owston, or where you will—sharp descents and steep ascents at first, then all smooth sailing and a perfect country. If your morning fox does not carry you to the woods of Owston, you will probably seek one for the afternoon at Ranksboro' Gorse—of which you have heard if ever you have heard of hunting. Below the sloping hill the level plain stretches across to the woods of Burley. To the left equally fine grass leads to Whissendine or Ashwell. To the right are Orton Park and Owston Woods, with their surroundings of turf unlimited; while behind are Somerby, Pickwell and the Punchbowl, with all that is inviting on the way. To make Ranksboro' a morning draw, Langham is the usual fixture. And now we move on to more extensive coverts—the chain of medium-sized woods, which, if in themselves not altogether without their drawbacks, yet in our humble opinion are the making of the Cottesmore country. You may not be fond of slushing through rides that occasionally take you in to the girths, and now and again cost you even an extra horse; and you may have a still greater objection to discovering that for the last half hour you have been straining every nerve to keep at least in

hearing of what turn out to be but two odd couple, while the body of the pack is miles away. But you forget all this when at last your turn comes to be with hounds as they issue forth for one of the long straight runs that belong only to a wild country and woodland bred foxes. Orton Park Wood (some fifty acres at the most) is one of the fairest samples of the Hunt. It is generally called upon in immediate sequence to an appeal to the hospitable precincts of Knossington Hall. There are always foxes at Orton Park Wood, and nearly always a run from it—whether over the half drained pastures towards Braunston or Barleythorpe, or on to Prior's Coppice or its neighbours, or by Ranksboro' to any other good point. Lady Wood forms a link with the larger woods of Owston, distant a smart five minutes' gallop. Owston Great Wood and Little Wood together are a couple of miles in length; but nowhere much more than a quarter of a mile in breadth. There is little undergrowth, but a hearty welcome has ever made the fastness sweet in vulpine eyes; and foxes are more often found by the half dozen. Hounds rattle through it like wildfire, slip away from it at the most unexpected point, and to make *sure* of a start with them is looked upon in the Hunt as a problem little short of squaring the circle. Owston Wood is often advertised as a meet; but from one point or another it is seldom left undrawn for a week. With a fox breaking back to Launde Wood there need not necessarily be a run, though there often will be. But let him go for the Quorn covert of John o' Gaunt, for the Twyford or Burrough lordships, and

there *must* be a gallop, passing fair and fast. Some two miles east of Owston Wood is another hundred-acre brake known as Prior's Coppice, for which Brook Hall or Leigh Lodge may be the meet, and round which a grand country circles to Oakham, Manton, and Belton. From here too the smaller copse of Oakham Pasture, and Manton Gorse, form either a second draw, or tempting points to fix a fox's course.

At the back of Owston Wood, and running parallel with it a couple of miles away, are Launde Wood and Launde Park Wood—each being deep rided, extensive, and well stored with foxes. Rough hills contain, and surround, these great coverts; and to post yourself at one spot with a view to getting away with hounds is merely accepting a hundred to one chance. You must wade the rides, or scramble through the thin undergrowth with hounds and huntsman. Then will you break into the open with them; and follow a fox that will hang nowhere till he is lost, or his mask is at the saddle. For the foxes of these *grass woodlands* (as we may term them, in contradistinction to the still bigger coverts of their eastern ploughs) love the open hills; and it is seldom their fault if they do not give a gallop. Round the parishes of Tugby, Belton, and Allexton there is a great grass country; or your line may be struck in the Melton direction. In the latter case you either run on towards the Quorn country (perhaps John O'Gaunt), or find yourself cutting through (seldom dwelling in) another cluster of woods—to wit Skeffington and Tilton Woods, Tugby Bushes, Loddington Redditch, and several of

minor growth. Deep dells, and lofty hills, hard climbing, continual energy and increasing movement, are the characteristics of this rough region and the cue for your conduct. A pony might show you all that takes place till the woods are suddenly quitted. *Then* you need the best horse your banker will find you, the best years of your youth, and a belief that most fences are to be jumped when the pace is good. For the Skeffington neighbourhood requires a dash and determination, a fling and a devilment, that are not called for in a more sober sphere—though that sphere be grass as quick scenting and one whereon hounds can fly as quick as here, For the fences of this district are *just* to be done—if the horse has all the best and boldest qualities of a true Leicestershire hunter, and the man is the pick of Melton or Market Harborough. Even then, he will have to turn aside now and again; for the bottoms which thread the valleys are not to be taken as they offer themselves; and the wide-built oxers are not to be trifled with, when twenty minutes up-and-down these green hills has taken the steel out of even a thoroughbred. Launde Abbey will be the meet for the good Launde Woods, and Loddington Hall and Tilton Wood will generally be named for the woods adjacent. Still further south we have Beaumont Chase as a fixture for Wardley Wood and Stoke End. A sixteen or seventeen miles' ride to covert recommends itself but indifferently to Meltonian taste; and, were Wardley Wood anything but what it is, the journey would seldom be made. But such a covert, whose wide turf rides are almost as carefully preserved as its breed of strong wild foxes,

may well draw men from a distance—when a reward may await them like the run of last season, to Leesthorpe and halfway back (a three hours' gallop, and of course a change of foxes). All round Wardley is a strong country; and the best line, perhaps, is one that will land you at Prior's Coppice.

Turning now to their Oakham, or middle country, by which term we have denominated the centre strip, running north and south past Oakham, we find that hounds are usually in it on Thursdays; and that it embraces such a variety of feature, as to include light easy grass, small gorse coverts, big woodlands and a wide extent of plough. The Bull at Witham Common and Crown Point are the northernmost meets; and may probably mean Gunby Gorse, whence a fox may come westwards for the grass, but is more likely to travel the light plough into the big woods of Witham or Morkery, and land you therein for the afternoon. If, however, a fair wind blows him to Woodwell Head, you may forthwith be embarked on quite a different campaign. Some of the prettiest ground in the Hunt is the timber-fenced vale that stretches below Woodwell Head (which, by the way, is a neat small wood of great attraction to foxes). The land here would seem to be more suited to the placid Leicester ewe, or, at most, the heavy milch cow—rather than to the restless shorthorn bullock—for the rails which go to make up the greater proportion of the fences are thin as hurdles and brittle as touchwood. So the faintest heart may travel in confidence till the Vale of Catmose changes its mood, as it is sure to do in a few miles to south or west. Then let

him be sure of himself, and of his mount—or a sudden reaction may take the place of the lately acquired boldness. Stocken Hall is another Thursday meet; and apropos of Morkery Wood it may be instanced that the four litters with which it is this year credited, are no more than its usual complement. Witham Wood is, like Morkery, a splendid covert for teaching young hounds: and it has, moreover, the character of being one of the best scenting coverts in the Cottesmore country—hounds being able to run hard through it in any weather. Market Overton, Teigh and Ashwell are also often named for Woodwell Head and Cottesmore Gorse, and a run over the valley to Ranksboro' is again the thing to wish for. From Market Overton a string of plantations are found under the hill running down to Burley, and likely to carry a fox on to that stronghold. The big wood of Burley is, like Wardley, celebrated for its sound open rides, and its store of foxes. The latter when disturbed are most likely to move forward to Barnsdale Wood, Hambleton Wood, and perhaps on to Normanton Park or to Exton Park. At Exton are the two good coverts of Cottesmore Wood and Tunby Wood. At Normanton the coverts are small, and after Christmas so open that foxes are apt to move elsewhere. At Greetham Inn are drawn other woodland coverts of Mr. Finch's, stretching up to the Pickwell and Holywell Woods, which, again, belong to Mr. Birch Reynardson, another staunch fox preserver. These are especially valuable for cubhunting —as, while holding plenty of cubs, there is always other game afoot, and every opportunity afforded of

impressing discrimination on the young entry. At the extreme south of this middle country are the meets of Luffenham and Ketton Hall. Luffenham Heath is another great stronghold for foxes, and right well cared for; but is held to be a curiously bad-scenting covert. Wakerly Woods, which adjoin, are the property of the Marquis of Exeter, and neutral with the Fitzwilliam, and they enjoy the reputation of being usually short of foxes. At Ketton is a range of old workings known as The Pitts, wherein foxes can get to ground at any time. Of the Thursday country (and applying to the Cottesmore territory *in toto*) it may be added that very little grass will be found to the east of Woodwell Head: while east of Luffenham we get on to light stony plough, whereon stone walls in a great measure supplant the black-thorn.

The eastern woodlands of the Cottesmore are very extensive, and occupy almost entirely their Mondays and Wednesdays. On these days they hunt as far eastward as the fens of Lincolnshire will allow, their country in this direction being limited only by the impracticable form (as far as hunting is concerned) into which it here lapses. Thus the great Car Dyke, passing through Bourn, may be said to be the boundary of operations on this side. Without dwelling at great length on the features of their woodlands, we may mention that among the more distant meets is Manthorpe, for Dikey Wood and Thurlby Park Wood—two sure finds. The foxes of this neighbourhood are well taken care of by the sporting farmers of the district. On the other side of the town we have

Bourn Wood, one of the largest coverts in the hunt, and in great favour during cubhunting. Part of this, including Oscar Wood, belongs to Lady Willoughby, and the remainder to Lord Exeter. From here, in fact, runs a great range of woodland to the north, and, passing through Elsthorpe Springs, we get to Dunsby Wood, which is neutral between the Cottesmore and the Belvoir. Grimsthorpe Castle is another Wednesday meet (the extreme east of the country being more often hunted on that day); the coverts in the park are a sure find; the park itself is four miles in length, and hounds often race along it from end to end—delighting in the oasis of grass. For all this portion of the Cottesmore country a stout, short-legged horse is to be recommended; and he must be able to *jump*, or he will certainly fathom some of the wide drains which he will have to encounter. Heavy plough is the prevailing feature of the soil; and in a wet season hounds can carry a good head over it and account for their foxes; but in a dry winter it is difficult ground to work over with success. Corby Bircholm for the Witham Woods and the other big coverts just below (and to most of which we have already alluded) is usually a Monday meet. Castle Bytham and Little Bytham Kennels are for the woods of Morkery and the coverts running south to Clipsham, which place—together with Holywell Hall and Greetham Inn—is for the Holywell Woods, Pickworth Wood, the Twin Woods, and the coverts round Exton Park; while Tickencote Hall is, perhaps, their southernmost Monday fixture. Uffington and Casewick (for Lord Kesteven's and Lord Lindsay's coverts

near Stamford) take them to the most distant of their Wednesday ground.

The following "official" document may be of interest, as setting forth the limits, and something of the history of the Hunt:

Boundaries of the COTTESMORE HUNT, 1842, when the Earl of Lonsdale gave up the country:

To the EAST, as far as practicable.

To the SOUTH, it is bounded by the River Welland as far as Duddington, it then extends to the Wakerley Woods, joining the Welland and Harringworth, which again divides the country as far as Rockingham.

To the WEST, the Brook that runs from Rockingham to Allexton is the division; Allexton Wood is neutral; the remaining part of the West side of the country is marked by the boundaries of the Lordships of East Norton, Tugby, Skeffington, Tilton Newton, Marefield and Quorn (?). These Lordships are all in the Cottesmore country with the exception of the coverts on Newton Hills which are neutral.

The NORTH, the Lordships of Little Dalby, Burton Lazars, Stapleford, Wymondham, Sewstern, Gunby, Stainby, Colsterworth, are in the Cottesmore; the road that runs between Easton and Witham Woods to Irnham village divides the country; the Burton Woods, Easton Wood and Pasture, Bitchfield, Osgaby Coppice, Irnham Old Park Wood, *Stoke Park Wood*, Butley Hall, *Kaisby*, *Kirkby*, *Aslackby*, and Dunsby Wood being neutral.

In 1807, Lord Sherard made a covert in Stainby conditionally, that it should be hunted alternately by the Cottesmore and Belvoir Packs.

On the 11th March, 1822, it was agreed by Lord Forester on he part of the Duke of Rutland and Colonel Lowther on the part of Lord Lonsdale, that Stoke Park Wood, Kirkby and Aslackby Woods, should be given up to the Belvoir Hunt.

Sir William Lowther (afterwards 1st Earl of Lonsdale) lived

at Uffington, when married in 1781, resided there three or four years, and then took Stocken, where the present Lord was born, he remained there till 1796. The late Earl kept harriers when at Uffington, and at the Duke of Ancaster's death converted them into foxhounds; and made rides which still exist in Bourn, Kirkby, Aslackby, Grimsthorpe, Bulby Hall, and Dunsby Wood; when Lord Lonsdale's hounds were sold, the Pedigree of his Pack went back 130 years.

Mr. Smith, of Edmondthorpe, kept a Pack of Foxhounds (no date to this memorandum.)

THE PUCKERIDGE.*

ACCESSIBILITY from London is a point that we have endeavoured to keep in mind in referring to each of the countries hitherto considered. Our sphere has, however, so far, lain beyond the scope of a day's hunting from Town: and accordingly can only have had interest for men desirous of planting themselves where at least a month of hunting may be attained, to the oblivion of all minor, or (may we say it?) more sordid pursuits. But there exists a large body of ardent sportsmen, who can only take their recreation by the day; who can only break in upon their week of labour by extra work on five days, that they may secure the sixth for a holiday; and who have also, by nature or by effort of will, the power to absorb themselves for a few short hours in the thrilling incidents of fox-hunting, and yet afterwards to recover mind and thought from the thraldom, the moment they return to office or re-enter chambers. The faculty is begotten, of course, of necessity: and the credit is due to circumstances, and to the sporting spirit which makes the best of a situation. The man is fond of

* *Vide* "Stanford's Railway and Hunting Map," sheet 16.

hunting and he must have it—yet must subordinate his passion to a mainer object. So only a day can be stolen here and there—while stocks and shares, briefs and patients, demand all his existence before the world. To such a man a country recommends itself, that will give him honest sport between breakfast and dinner, and allow him a steam covert hack for his morning and evening ride. He may keep a couple of horses on the spot; but he himself must snatch an early breakfast, finish the bows of his leathers in a hansom, and with a cigarette, the *Times*, and a heart full of hope, work out the next hour not altogether uncomfortably in a soft-cushioned railway carriage.

Within easy morning's rail of London is the Puckeridge Hunt—with an old-established and excellent pack, and a sporting, if not a brilliant country. Here a man may see a great deal of genuine hunting, without any great primary outlay in horseflesh, and without having to encounter greater risk to life and limb than is consistent with steady business habits and an increasing family. The Puckeridge country is, generally speaking, plough. A grass field may be seen here and there, but has a foreign look amid the many miles of tillage. Like most other arable, the soil will carry a scent best when wet; and when wet it is, of course, less pleasant riding. But a fox generally leaves sign enough to ensure himself a hard pressed journey; and the Puckeridge are not behind their neighbours in accounting for their game. A horse that can move steadily on, through dirt and difficulty, is the animal to ride here—one that will trot and canter all day, that will squeeze through a

hole in a thick dark bullfinch without dashing your face into the thorns, that will crawl over a bank and scramble in and out of the wide ditch beyond—and at all times take the office from his master. A rash impetuous horse will quickly break his own back, and possibly his confiding owner's neck—except, it may be, in the eastern strip of the country, or in a foray into the Ruthins of the Essex, where the fences are low and unbanked, and may be taken in a fly by a vigorous jumper.

Bishop's Stortford and Buntingford are the two quarters where horses can best be stationed, to hunt with the Puckeridge. Buntingford is more in the centre of the country; but Bishop's Stortford is easier reached from Town, and is nearer to the present kennels. Furneuse Pelham is the actual centre spot of the Hunt, and nearly a century ago was chosen by Mr. Calvert for his kennels; but it would nowadays scarcely answer the purpose of a base for the hunting-man running down from London. Mr. Parry kept his hounds at Albury; and Mr. Gosling, the present Master, has built kennels at Manewden, between three and four miles from Bishop's Stortford. From Liverpool Street Station it is but an hour's journey by the Great Eastern to Bishop's Stortford; and, according to present arrangements, a train leaving London at 9.10 slips a carriage at the latter place at 10.8—which should allow you time to reach all the nearer meets. For the wider fixtures you will, of course, have to break your fast sooner, and take an earlier train.

The Puckeridge hunt three days a week, Monday,

Wednesday, and Saturday: and Mr. Gosling adds a frequent bye day—indeed, after Christmas, Friday is almost always included in the programme of the week.

Monday is taken up essentially with the home country; and its limits may be said to be marked (though not imperatively)—on the *west* by the road leading from Ware to Barkway, on the *east* by the old London-and-Cambridge turnpike road, which runs almost alongside the railway.

Some of the chief Monday draws (and all very sure finds) are Maddams, Hadham Park coverts, Patmore Hall, Hormead Park, Turks, and The Hammels. Maunden Mill or Thorley Wash will be the meet for Maddams; The Angel Inn, Little Hadham, or Patmore Heath for Hadham Park; Barkway or the Pelhams for Hormead, and often Standon for The Hammels (which coverts, again, consisting of park plantations and copses, are not unfrequently drawn on a Saturday). All this Monday country is of a very cramped character; and to creep your fences slowly must be the order of your going, if you would cross it at all successfully. And the Hadham district especially merits the description.

On Wednesdays they move over to the east of this London-and-Cambridge road for their Widdington country and the neutral Forest; or else work the extreme north of their territory, above a line drawn from, say, Barkway to Saffron Walden. In the former district they meet at Debden Cross, Peverelle and Widdington, for Rowney and Widdington Woods, two fine coverts bordering on the Thaxted country

—which (though within the boundaries of the Essex) presents a tempting arena for Puckeridge foxes, when these woods do themselves justice. Of late years, however, 'tis said, the pheasants have taking to crowing so loud that they have somewhat interfered with bold Reynard's comfort; and he is not so often found at home as is to be wished. For the Thaxted district, though plough, has all the good qualities of "the Ruthins"—to wit, good scenting soil, low thorn fences which may be charged anywhere (the faster the better, if you would clear the wide deep ditches beyond), and which nowhere obstruct the rider's view of hounds as they run over the broad open fields.

Takeley Forest, on the contrary, is a splendid instance of hearty and unselfish fox-preserving. It is neutral between the Puckeridge and the Essex, and yet there is always game enough for both—as may be gathered from the fact that the former pack killed four brace of foxes from it last season. Mr. J. Archer-Houblon no longer hunts himself, though he was formerly co-partner with Messrs. Parry and W. Wigram: for some years they had the pack between them, till Mr. Parry bought the shares of the other two gentlemen. From Takeley you will expect, or rather hope, to run into the Essex Ruthins. Sir Richard Sutton (no mean authority) gave it as his opinion that the Ruthins were "the best plough land in England;" and, in our humble way, we are far from wishing to contradict him. In the Ruthins you can always see hounds at their work, and you may always ride to them, fast and freely and wide of their backs. If you drop into the ditches, you

should have a sovereign in your pocket for the assistance of a plough team; but with the pace well on, and the spurs well in to a sticky one, Providence will generally help you over the Ruthins. Elsdenham is another capital meet on a Wednesday; for East End, a fine holding covert of Mr. Gilby's, who, while renting the shooting, does ample duty by foxhunting. "Birchanger" gives Birchanger Wood: and other coverts yet to be named are Quendon, Broom Wood, Ugley (or Oakley) Park, and Alsa Wood. To the north are various woodlands—among them Langley High Wood, Roughway, Clavering Park, Scales Park, Cheshall Wood, and Earl's Wood. In the extreme south Stanstead is more often chosen for a Wednesday, though often included also in a Saturday's bill of fare.

The Saturday or western country may be said to extend from Wade's Mill northwards to Royston, going westward (as will be seen from the map) as far as Watton, and, higher up, a little beyond Walkern and Wallington. Its leading coverts are Sacombe, Coombe Wood, Bennington High Wood, St. John's Wood (an excellent stand-by), Broadfield and Friars Woods, and the small coverts at Clothall — also Sandon Row, Reed Wood, and Capons Wood (this last seldom without a fox). From Friar's Wood, some thirty years ago, Mr. Parry (to whom, by the way, the high standard of the Puckeridge pack is entirely owing) had his most celebrated hunt. To this day he calls it "my run." It ended in his fox getting to ground, in view, at Sandy Warren, between Cambridge and Woburn. Some of the Saturday

meets are Nuthampstead, Old Hall Green, Layston Church (a favourite fixture, with the Capons in view), Throcken (for Friar's Broadfield, &c.), Munden, and Bennington, with occasionally Watton for the Ware district. Box Wood and Aston Bury in the extreme west are neutral coverts with the Hertfordshire, for which Walkern is a frequent meet.

For a byeday, Hunsdon, Great Hadham (or Much Hadham, as it is called in the language of the county), and occasionally Standon, are usually chosen—with coverts at Eastwick, Plashes, Blake's Bushes (small but well favoured), Buckney, and Culvers.

To sum up, the best scent for the last three seasons has been found in the Monday country, though in Mr. Parry's time the Saturday ground had the best reputation. The Monday country has, as we have said, the disadvantage of being extremely cramped, while on Saturdays you find yourself with more room to ride. Round Royston, for instance, the country is very open, and the coverts only small plantations. The greater part of the Puckeridge territory is well stored with foxes, though, as we have hinted, there are certain parts (east and south) where foxes might have rather more chance given them, without buying the goodwill of neighbours too dearly.

THE OLD BERKELEY.*

ANOTHER country of old tradition and honoured name, existing close to London, is the Old Berkeley. As its title almost implies, it was at one time part of the original Berkeley country, and to this day its hunt servants wear the Fitzhardinge livery of yellow plush. In the days we allude to the then Lord Berkeley hunted a vast territory stretching from Berkeley Castle to London, bringing his hounds into what is now the Old Berkeley country for the spring and autumn, and remaining at home for the winter months.

The fact that the Old Berkeley no longer advertise their meets would point to a desire on their part to exclude strangers. If such were absolutely the case, it would render our task of facilitating acquaintance with their hounds and country a somewhat delicate—or even ungracious—one. But this apparent objection to intrusion by no means points to the hunting man proper, though he, too, often finds himself

* Stanford's map, sheet 16, will illustrate, more or less satisfactorily, the geography of the O. B. H.; though it will be noticed that it fails to colour the neutral territory.

inconvenienced by a reticence which forbids approach. It has been called into existence by the pressure of a swarm of nondescripts, who, starting from every suburb in London, were glad to make a meet of fox-hounds their excuse for a holiday on hackney or in waggonette—overwhelming the whole procedure of the chase by their presence, and irritating farmers and landowners to the great injury of the hunt. Thus it was found necessary to make known the places of meeting only to subscribers, and even to take the additional precaution of substituting Tuesday for Saturday in the Watford country—so to escape the "Saturday-outers," as they are termed with the Surrey Union. But a subscription (it need not be a heavy one) will always procure a weekly card of the fixtures; and the man for whom foxhunting is really a pursuit will always find a welcome with the Old Berkeley. It is not a superlatively good country—even its best friends will not assign to it more than comparative merit. But it has its advantages—of being within the easiest possible reach of London, and so immediately available to the man who can only steal away from business for an occasional single day; of being thoroughly hunted, and by no means deficient of sport.

Though its chief features are included in the terms *wood and plough,* there yet remains in the Watford and Harrow district a small stretch of as good grass as is to be ridden over in England. Year by year the advancing wave of brick and mortar is narrowing this chosen area. But, over and above the encroachments of building, there is an inner cause militating

against the full vigour of the chase within what might indeed be a charmed circle. As London grows farther westward, the land it nears becomes daily more and more valuable; and more and more do the occupants begrudge any damage that might accrue to the remaining acres of their rich pasturage. The soil being a deep clay, the passage of horses is, when the ground is wet, not only an eyesore, but an almost ineradicable source of mortification to those who hold the land. It is difficult to see how tangible harm can be done by galloping over grass, however wet; for what nature will not do in the way of "welling up" the footprints, a roller should easily put to rights in good time for the scythe—while as for the passage of a field of horses availing to *destroy* grass, the "poaching" of four times the number of hoofs likely to accompany the Old Berkeley could not do it, except by trampling ever on the same spot. However, the fact remains that, as soon as the Harrow Vale becomes deep, it is forthwith almost forbidden ground.

No less than three lines of railway will land you in the Old Berkeley country, viz., the Midland, the London-and-North-Western, and the Great Western; and your journey by either will not amount to an hour. The Midland is nowadays of use for but few meets—Newberries being one of them, and close to Radlett Station. In former days this was a rendezvous very highly thought of; and many and oft were the good gallops from Newberries Gorse over the grass to Mimms Wood and Scratch Wood (near Elstree). The latter covert is within eight miles, as the crow flies, from Hyde Park Corner. But of late years

foxes from Newberries have declined this line. Efforts, however, are being made to re-establish the reputation of the other two coverts; and so to bring this, the best piece of the country, again into favour.

The London and North-Western commands nearly the whole of the country, and a man wishing to join the O.B.H. cannot do better than keep his horses at Watford or Tring, at both of which places he will find the best of loose boxes at his call. At Watford he will get both the O.B.H. and the Hertfordshire; while at Tring he will have these two packs, with Mr. Selby Lowndes' pack and the Baron's Staghounds besides. Near Watford are the neutral coverts of Newberries and Bricket; and the Hertfordshire also claim the right of drawing Scratch Wood. Newberries is still counted as offering as good a chance of a run as anything in the hunt; for, if a fox from it will only choose his direction aright, he must give a pretty gallop. (They have been known to kill a fox from here in the middle of Watford.) Bricket Wood is an immense place, pretty sure find, but difficult to get away from, and the rides are of deep clay. But for all this it is a covert of a great value to the hunt. Other meets near Watford (which we may consider as on the whole the most convenient base for the O.B.H., and which is only half an hour from Euston-square Station) are Hamper Mill, Hunton Bridge (for Mr. Jones Lloyd's coverts at Langley Bury), Croxley Green, Chenies (for Lord Chesham's good coverts), Cassiobury (for Lord Essex's), Grove Park (a pretty meet for Lord Clarendon's), Moor Park (for

Lord Ebury's), Chandler's, and Chorley Wood Common. The Duke of Bedford owns a good deal of property near the last-named place and Chenies; and one of his tenants generally has a fox in Weedon's Gorse and Fox Wood. Mr. Gilliatt's Gorse is also a valuable covert, and so is Bottom Wood.

The stations of King's Langley, Boxmoor, Berkhampstead, and Tring (L. & N. W. R.) all command meets of the O.B.H. Mr. Longman has built new kennels at his place at Shendish (midway between the two first-named stations); and within a small radius from the kennels are the meets of Chipperfield Common, Bovingdon Green, Layhill Common, Whelpley Hill, Ashley Green, Haresfoot and Wiggington Common. The master has good coverts of his own; and Scatterell's and Woodman's Wood do credit to the same neighbourhood, with good foxes. Near Layhill Common, Lord Chesham provides the very useful covert of Cowcroft; and Haresfoot, though not quite so productive of late, has generally furnished the needful animal. And this part of their country is rather more open than most of the O.B.H.

A little more apart from the lines of railway, but within easy riding reach of Watford, is the Amersham district—in which Mr. T. Drake, of Shardeloes, and Lord Chelsham are the principal covert owners. About Missenden and Wendover the country is hilly, flinty, and wild, but generally affords sport. Among the meets hereabouts are the Black Horse Amersham, Penn Street Church, Tyler's Green Penn, Peterley Manor, Chesham Poor's-Common, Charteridge, Little Missenden, Missenden Abbey, and Nag's Head Great

Missenden, Hyde Heath, Hampden Church, Wendover Hall, Chequers Court and Saunderton.

In the extreme north of their country is included a small corner of the Vale of Aylesbury; and hounds are taken there a few times during the season. But in the days when the Earl of Lonsdale hunted the country, it was the regular custom of the "Old Lord" to meet in the Vale once a week with his "harriers" as he called them. These were nothing more or less than a pack of dwarf foxhounds; and in front of them he was wont to turn down a bag fox that had been regularly *conditioned and trained in a yard at home.* In this way, with both Jim and Goddard Morgan successively as huntsmen, there was many a merry gallop over the Vale: and familiar to every Hertfordshire man are the lines of the late Mr. Wm. Reid (so well known at that time with Lord Dacre's hounds), beginning

> There's a noble Earl of antient name;
> He hunts the fox, but he likes it tame.

And that there was no deception about the proceeding, but that it was carried on in the frankest fashion, may be gathered from the dialogue described as taking place before the assembled field—culminating in

> Says the noble earl to the elder Brown—
> "Open the box and turn him down!"

The Uxbridge neighbourhood is attainable by the Great Western Railway; and is nearest of all to the actual Harrow Vale. In fact, from Ruislip Wood or Oxley Wood is nowadays the only chance of a spurt

over the Vale proper; and is looked for as eagerly as a scurry over the Bushey and Elstree country is waited for from Newberries. Ruislip and Oxley are both big deep woods: generally holding foxes. Indeed, this part of the O.B.H. country, though thickly wooded, and not altogether good riding ground (being often deep and boggy), is better stocked with foxes than any in the hunt—and especially round Hedgerley and Fulmer. The following is a list of meets that will probably anticipate anything on the fixture-card. We have given them thus fully throughout this article that the names may be found connected with one or other of the points mentioned as accessible, by train or otherwise—Denham Place, Denham Court, Harefield, West Hyde, Maple Cross, Newlands, Gott's Monument, The Pheasant at Chalfont, Chalfont Potteries, Gerrard's Cross Common, Longbottom Walton Park, Fulmer Hall, Hedgerley, Hall Barn, and The Feathers Taplow. The leading covert owners of the district are the Duke of Somerset, Sir Robert Harvey, Messrs. Hibbert, W. Thompson, Du Pré, and Allen. Hodgemoor (a first-rate covert for foxes, though not altogether easy to ride through) is, we believe, the property of Lord Denbigh.

In conclusion, it may be said that the O.B.H. is a country where, as long as anywhere, foxhunting has been made the most of. There are, it is true, here and there resident landowners who try and excuse themselves for their lukewarmedness in the cause by the plea that the country is not naturally well suited for the sport. But in spite of cold scenting ground and other difficulties many foxes are killed; and the

hounds are right well-cared for in their present hands.

With the O.B.H. you will find the fences that most often tempt you to jump are light stake-and-bounds, with small ditches—though in the Elstree neighbourhood more leaping power will be wanted, and a timber jumper is everywhere useful. But only the angels' visits to the vales of Harrow and Aylesbury demand a flying horse.

Yet the visitor will often, if he be fond of hounds and hunting for their own sake, be well rewarded in a trip to the O.B.H. He may hunt with them with less labour, and as little expense, as he will anywhere. Lastly, as to the class of horse he should take with him, we should advise him to buy as good a one as he can get—for a little money.

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